

M O R A L
ENTERTAINMENTS

ON THE MOST IMPORTANT
PRACTICAL TRUTHS

OF THE
CHRISTIAN RELIGION.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

BY THE REV. ROBERT MANNING.

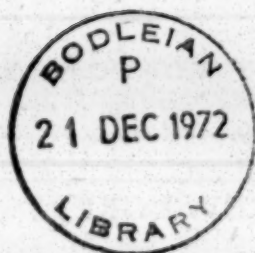
AUTHOR OF ENGLAND'S CONVERSION AND REFORMATION COMPARED;—AND OTHER TRACTS.

CANCELLED

DUBLIN:

PRINTED BY P. WOGAN,
NO. 23, OLD-BRIDGE.

1795.



TO THE
RIGHT HONOURABLE
THE
LORD PETRE,
BARON OF WRITTLE.

MY LORD,

THE following moral tracts owe their birth, principally to the generous bounty of the noble family, which is completely happy in having your lordship for its head. It is therefore an act of gratitude, nay, of justice, to make an offering of them to your lordship, who may claim them as your right; and they have reciprocally a kind of title to your lordship's protection, which they now humbly beg of you. Your most honoured father and grandfather (whose memories are still as dear to all that knew them, as their persons were whilst alive) were pleased to honour them with their esteem; and their two most excellent surviving ladies, who are the patterns and ornaments of their sex, have likewise done me that honour. I have therefore encouragement enough to hope they will not be unacceptable to your lordship; nor have I any reason to fear the

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DEDICATION.

liberty I now take in publishing, under the protection of your lordship's name, will give offence to those who are of a different persuasion from us; as we all agree in acknowledging the indispensable obligation incumbent on us, of practising all the moral duties of a Christian life. Now these alone are the subject of the following discourses; and if I sometimes touch passingly upon a controverted point, it is not to contest or dispute, but only to usher in some particular duty, with which it has a necessary connection.

Not to trespass upon your lordship's patience, I will only add, that nothing but the deep sense of gratitude, which I have for the innumerable favours I have received from your most honoured family (to which I am indebted for all I possess in this world) could have prevailed upon me to give this public testimony of it. May your lordship live many years, to be the honour as well as support of your family; the father of the poor; a refuge to the distressed; and, in a word, a faithful imitator of the illustrious patterns of virtue you have daily before your eyes; which are the most hearty wishes of,

MY LORD,

*Your Lordship's most obedient
and humble Servant,*

R. MANNING.

P R E F A C E.

THE following Entertainments having hitherto served only for the use of a private assembly, the reader must not be surprised to find me sometimes addressing myself, as is usual in sermons, to the congregation before me. However, I did not think it proper to call them by that name; because the method commonly used in sermons is very different from what I have made choice of in these discourses. But it is not at all material by what name they are called, so they do but answer the principal end they are designed for, which is, to move sinners to a serious repentance and amendment of life, and give them the best advice I can, in order to it. It was this I had principally in view, in my choice of the important truths, I have handled in relation to Death, Judgment, Hell, and Heaven; the enormity, and fatal consequences of sin, &c. which are the subjects treated in the thirty-one entertainments of this volume. But what will appear peculiar in this volume is, that the discourses it contains are linked together with almost the same connections, as the several chapters of a book relating to one subject.

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The second volume is made up of miscellaneous and unconnected subjects; some of which I was led to by the gospels of the Sundays, on which I had occasion to speak; others were my voluntary choice, because I thought them useful to the generality of Christians. But I have always taken care not to force my text to come over to my subject, but to make my subject follow my text; so that whoever reads but the text, will immediately know what entertainment is prepared for him. And it is for this reason I have not confined myself to any particular gospel, nor even always to the New Testament, but allowed myself full liberty to take my text from any part of the word of God: that so I might be wholly unconstrained in the choice of my subject; wherein I always had a principal regard to the benefit of those I was to instruct.

I will not here trouble the reader with any apology for the meanness of my performance. For let that be as it will, I have done my best to do him good: And if, in reading the following entertainments, he will but take the interest of his salvation as seriously to heart, as I have laboured to instruct him in the method of attaining to it, I hope I shall not be wholly frustrated of the end I have proposed to myself; which is, to be assisting to him in the management of that important concern.

*However, I will not presume to flatter myself, that the entertainments I have prepared will please all sorts of palates; being sensible that those, who
are*

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are already considerably advanced in the way of perfection, would be much more agreeably entertained with lectures of a more sublime and spiritual taste. For I cannot deny but the greatest part of the subjects I have chosen are to the persons now mentioned much like the first rudiments of learning to a consummated scholar: And though the very alphabet of Christianity, and the most vulgar truths of the Christian doctrine, may be rendered profitable, even to the most perfect, it is certain, however, that all truths are not equally useful to all states. St. Paul spoke wisdom amongst the perfect; sapientiam autem loquimur inter perfectos: But to the imperfect he wrote thus, I have fed you with milk, and not with meat, for hitherto ye were not able to bear it; neither yet are ye able. So that the circumstances of persons are no less to be considered in the choice of advice, or truths to be delivered to them, than their constitutions in the choice of meats.

*Now I have neither writ for priests nor religious, but for laicks only; that is, for persons engaged in the commerce of the world, and exposed to all the dangers and corruptions of it: And those I have endeavoured to feed with milk, and not with meat; for they are not able to bear it; that is, I have made it my principal business to instruct them in all the most essential and indispensable duties of a Christian life: I have laid such considerations before them, as are most proper to wean
their*

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their hearts from all sinful and inordinate affections to the things of this world; to inspire them with a hatred to sin, a love of virtue, and a serious concern for the salvation of their souls. Finally, I have recommended to them a regular uniformity, in the practice of such exercises and devotions as are both suited to their circumstances, and will help to nourish and strengthen the forementioned Christian dispositions in their souls.

All this, I hope, they will find performed in the two volumes of these entertainments; wherein if they meet sometimes with repetitions of the same truths or maxims, I must assure them it was wholly unavoidable. First, because since several duties, flow from one and the same principle, it was impossible to explain these several duties, without repeating the principle upon which they are grounded. 2dly, Because general remedies must of necessity be repeated, as often as any particular distemper, for which they are prescribed, is spoken of. And, 3dly, As the same unhappy state of sinners, the dangers that attend it, and the methods of their cure, are represented under divers parables or figures, in moralizing upon some of these I was unavoidably led to a repetition of the same reflections, remonstrances, and advice, without which, the subject I had undertaken could not be fully handled, and my discourse upon it would have been manifestly defective.

*But though these reasons had not obliged me to a frequent repetition of some truths; yet I believe some
readers,*

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readers, at least, will find their account in it: for all persons are not quite so happy in their memories, nor so easy in receiving lasting impressions, but that they may stand in need of being told the same thing oftner than once. Besides, as the same meat does not always go down with an equal relish, so it is with spiritual truths, which are the food of our souls. What we may not relish, or be touched with at one time, may have better success, and affect us very sensibly at another. St. Augustine was in a moment determin'd to an entire change of life, by reading a few lines in St. Paul; yet it is probable he had read them many times before, but till that happy moment, they had been as so much seed thrown upon a barren soil. And we observe the same diversity of success in physical prescriptions, for the same physic administered to the same patient has a good effect sometimes, and often none at all. And therefore as a patient cannot reasonably be angry at his physician for repeating the same dose, as often as he thinks it for his good, so the reader cannot justly quarrel with me for giving him the same advice often over, unless he can convince me that every one, who shall read these entertainments, will be so docile as not to stand in need of being told the same thing oftner than once, which I can rather wish, than hope for; since we find, by experience, that the distempers of the soul are usually even more obstinate than those of the body.

I hope I shall not need to fear being accused of too much rigour. For though I have been under a necessity

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necessity of handling many severe truths, I am not conscious to myself of having overstrained any.

But be that as it will, I sincerely submit both this and whatever I have writ, to the judgment and correction of my superiors. And being sensible how easily some unguarded expressions may have slipped from my pen, in so great a number and variety of discourses, it is my hearty request, that whether I be alive or dead, they may not be printed without being first strictly examined, by some person of known judgment and learning.

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M O R A L ENTERTAINMENTS.

THE FIRST ENTERTAINMENT.

THE CERTAINTY OF DEATH.

In all thy works remember thy last end. Eccl. vii. 40.

MAN's greatest weakness consists in receiving too easily impressions from sensible objects. The care and solitudes of life fill his heart, and its pleasures corrupt it, by drawing it from God and the concerns of a future state : So that when any agreeable object presents itself, we naturally move towards it with affection and entertain it with pleasure. It possesses the imagination, it seizes the heart ; and when the place is thus taken up to our satisfaction, all serious thoughts are so much worm-wood, presented to persons that are gratifying themselves with the most delicious wines : And we are so far from inviting them to us, that we usually reject them, as envious intruders, that come and disturb or imbitter all our pleasures.

This easiness in our nature, of receiving violent impressions from sensible objects may be looked upon as the root of all our passions, and by consequence, of all the disorders of human life ; and the best remedy against this weakness is the frequent consideration of such truths, as are most proper either to prevent the violence of

those impressions, or give an early check to them, when they happen to surprise us. The remedy is distasteful indeed, but absolutely necessary, like bitter draughts to recover a decayed or depraved appetite.

Now of all the truths of the Christian religion, none are more proper to produce these happy effects, than those which regard our *last end*, especially, if by repeated serious reflections, we imprint them so deeply in our hearts, as to render them familiar to us, *In all thy works remember thy last end*. Oh! how little would this world appear, if, like the royal prophet, we always kept eternity in view! How weak would all its charms become, if we considered, and were convinced in our hearts, that they are the seeds of everlasting misery and torments! Would men so easily venture upon the violation of God's holy law, if they remembered that there is a day to come, in which that law will judge them, and if found guilty, doom them to eternal flames! Or would they have the boldness to live on for months and years together in the state of mortal sin, if they reflected seriously that death may surprise them in that state; and that if it should surprise them, they are lost without remedy! No, certainly. All criminal pleasures presented to a heart penetrated with these truths, would lose their relish. Innocence would find them an effectual preservative against sin; and the most corrupt temper would grow uneasy under the stings and terrors they would leave behind them.

For which reason, as the *Holy Ghost* has recommended to us the thoughts of death and eternity, as a universal remedy against sin; so the *evil spirit*, who opposes our salvation with the utmost malice, knowing by experience the
power

power and efficacy of this remedy, not only in those whom it has preserved from falling, but many more, whom it has effectually delivered from the tyranny of their passions, and rescued from eternal death; the devil, I say, who has found this by experience, does all he can to keep those wholesome thoughts at the greatest distance from us; but especially from those, whom he has already in his power: And therefore, if the sudden death of any person, or some exemplary judgment happens to alarm them, as it does sometimes, the devil fails not to procure them immediately some diversion, or amusement, to put it out of their heads. It frightens them a little at first, wears off by degrees, and so they think no more of it.

In like manner if the casual hearing of some pious discourse should begin to touch them, the devil has opportunities and objects ready at hand to work upon their prevailing passions, and by means of them to prevent the continuance of any other impression. Nay, if former objects that have served to entertain them with criminal pleasures for some time, begin to lose their charm, and grow stale upon their hands, the devil is officious enough to furnish them with fresh ones, lest their passions coming to cool, or abate with disuse, should give opportunity for serious thoughts to work them into a better disposition. And thus he leads them on thoughtless from sin to sin, till either a sudden death, occasioned perhaps by the excess of criminal disorders, hurries them to the tribunal of God; or, if they have some time of sickness allowed them, they are strongly tempted to die impenitent, or at the best have nothing but the uncertainty and deceitfulness of a death-bed repentance to depend upon for their eternal salvation.

And it is one of these the devil always aims at, in diverting sinners from the wholesome thoughts of death; to the end that, by never thinking of it till it come, *rushing upon them like a storm* (as the word of God expresses it) they may always live unprepared for it.

In order, therefore, to prevent this irreparable misfortune, I shall now begin some considerations upon the *certainly of death*; which shall be the whole subject of this entertainment.

The fifth chapter of *Genesis* furnishes us with a most excellent meditation upon death. It contains a list of those ancient patriarchs who first propagated mankind, and each verse is closed with this doleful sentence, *et mortuus est*, and he died. *Adam* lived 930 years, *et mortuus est*, and he died. *Enos* lived 905 years, *et mortuus est*, and he died. *Mathusala* lived 969 years, *et mortuus est*, and he died. In effect these few words, *vixit et mortuus est*, he lived and died, are a compendious history of mankind: Since of all those millions of men, women, and children, from the first that entered upon the theatre of this world, to him who went off last, the most assured account that can be given of them is, that they all *lived and died*. Some have been allowed to act a longer part than others; but all made their *exit* at last, and were forced to submit to the stroke of death.

Enoch also and *Elijah*, who were reserved by God to be his champions against the wicked *Antichrist*, must undergo at last the common punishment of sin. The payment of the debt is not remitted, but delayed; and death will claim its right before they can be cloathed with immortality. Nay, the blessed *Mother of God*, though privileged in an extraordinary manner, yet was not exempt from paying the common debt of
the

the children of *Adam*. And *Christ* himself, having taken our sins upon him, would not enter into glory, but by becoming first *obedient unto death, even the death of the cross*.

Thus Almighty God has taken care that the belief we have of the certainty of death, shall not be weakened by any of those artifices, men ordinarily make use of, to disguise many other truths that suit not with their inclinations. For though no truth be more disrelishing to nature, than that we must once die, yet none was ever less doubted of. The unquestionable experience of so many ages already past, forms in every man's judgment so full a conviction of it, that even those, who had the vanity to think themselves so far exalted above the rest of human kind, as to challenge divine honours, were never so mad as to flatter themselves into an opinion of their being exempt from the general law of death.

The devil himself, since the first sad proof of mortality in the death of *Abel*, never had the impudence to impose upon any man, that he should not die. It was indeed the cheat he once put upon our first parents, before experience could give him the lie. But this imposture has since been too gross to succeed a second time. He therefore says not to us, *ye shall not die*, but he only endeavours to make us believe, we shall not die so soon as perhaps we may be apt to fear. He tells us we have youth or health on our side, the prospect of many years before us, and a strong constitution, to secure us against an untimely end: Aiming by these artifices, to keep the thoughts of death at the greatest distance from us, since he cannot destroy our belief of it.

For this reason many have endeavoured to countermine the devil's craft and malice, by

keeping a death's head in their bed-chambers or closets, to serve them as a looking-glass to see themselves in, and be daily put in mind of what they must once come to. So the pious *Maximilian* had always a coffin standing at his bed-side, that he might begin and end each day with the wholesome thought of death: and another prince, for the same purpose, ordered one of his pages to greet him daily with this morning salutation, *Remember that thou art a mortal man.*

However, we need not have recourse to such extraordinary expedients, to put us in mind of our mortality. The very air we breathe, the meat we daily eat, and the cloaths we wear, to hinder death from seizing us, before the time ordained by Providence, may do this office for us. Nay, the very earth whereon we tread, under which there lie already crumbled into dust, so many of our acquaintance and relations, who were once as gay and merry, as strong and healthful, as the youngest of this company, may, as we walk, and often loiter away our precious hours, put us in mind what costly matter these bodies, we so idolize, were originally composed of, and what they must again return into. We need no other monitor to make us remember that their beginning was, and end will be, no other than dust and clay.

Who is the man alive (says David) that will not see death? For the certainty of death is the same as that of life. Because life, if rightly considered, is but the way or passage to death; into which (says *Seneca*) whoever is once entered, must continue without stopping till he falls into the hands of death. *Remember (says Solomon) that death stops not:* and the reason is because life stops not. So that life is nothing but a continual dying; that is, a continual moving towards its

its end, which is death. For which reason, the word of God compares man's life to a *race*. Which similitude expresses both the swiftness and uninterrupted continuance of its course. And we may truly say, we are already dead to all the years we have already lived; since what is past can now no more be reckoned a part of our lives, than the blood out of our veins, or what age has already consumed of our bodies, can be called a part of our present being.

Since therefore all must die; since death is an irresistible debt, which all must pay to nature; since we are already dying, and in the hands of death, we ought in time to contract a familiarity with it, that we may not be surpris'd, when it comes to seize us once for all.

St. *Austin* upon these words of the Psalmist, *Let them descend alive into Hell*, gives this most excellent advice; *Let us descend alive, that we may not descend into Hell when we are dead*. Now it will be no less profitable, to go down sometimes by thought and meditation into the grave of some deceased friend; where if our curiosity invites us, to enquire what state his soul is now in, let us reflect upon his life past; and we may in some degree, though not with an infallible certainty, inform ourselves. Because a good life is generally rewarded with a happy death, and a good death seldom follows a bad life.

If he lived (as St. *Paul* exhorts us) *temperately, justly, and godly, looking for the blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ*, we may confidently pronounce the soul of that man happy. But, if on the contrary, he *followed ungodliness and worldly lusts*, if he lived in the practice of wilful sin, and continued it to his last sickness; it is true indeed, we cannot pass a peremptory sentence upon

him, because the depth of God's mercies is as unsearchable as his judgments; yet we may, without any danger of rash judgment, pronounce his salvation to be very doubtful, and even questionable, beyond the ordinary degree of uncertainty, which attends the generality of men, whatever appearances there may be for or against him.

Let us consider next, that as he was once what we are now, strong and healthful, big with projects for the time to come, and as little suspecting the stroke of death, as the rest of his surviving friends, so must we once be what he now is, (and God Almighty knows how soon) wrapped up in a shroud, shut up within a narrow coffin, laid under ground, trampled upon by future generations, and, in a word, as little either thought or spoken of as he now is. Our dearest friends will then pass by us, or walk over us, with the same indifference and unconcern, as if we were a thing of past ages, and had never had the least share in their thoughts. And here is an end of all that esteem and love, we often court with so much passion, and purchase perhaps by pawning soul and conscience for it. This is the reward we must expect, from this so much adored and courted world. Oh! how truly happy are they, whose hearts are fixed on God alone; who are enamoured of no beauty, and seek no love but his. For this is a solid and lasting good, which alone could comfort us at the hour of death, accompany us even beyond the grave, where all things else forsake us; and, when these bodies are turned into dust, render our souls eternally happy.

But let us still pass on to a third consideration, and imagining ourselves to be in the grave with some deceased friend, let us entertain ourselves with

with him for some few moments, and ask him some account of the other world. Let us enquire what his thoughts now are of his life past. Oh! let his condition be what it will, we may be sure, that if he were allowed to speak his answer would be, that were he to live his past years over again, he would employ them otherwise than he did formerly, or we do now. All worldly pleasures, sinful excesses, unprofitable amusements to trifle away time, pursuit of honours, heaping up riches, studying revenge, and the like, would be the farthest from his thoughts.

For, if his soul be happily united to God, the blessed sight of that incomprehensible majesty, that infinite goodness, and infinite wisdom, has now given him a quite different idea from what he formerly had, or men can have in this life, of the monstrous blackness and deformity of sin. He would tell us, that were his soul to return again to his body, it were impossible he should ever have the heart to offend God with deliberate reflection.

But if his soul, unworthy yet to be admitted to the blessed fruition, be for some time condemned to purging flames, till she be purified from all dross and alloy of earthly defilements, and has paid the last farthing of the debt contracted by his past follies; Oh! could he utter his thoughts, he would give you a most lamentable account of his sufferings. He would tell you, his soul is tortured with unspeakable anguish for his past sins; that his grief, for being kept back from the enjoyment of Almighty God, is beyond expression or imagination; finally, that all the torments of this world are not to be compared with the least of those his soul endures.

But what a frightful account would he give of his condition, if his unhappy soul be doomed to everlasting flames! With what piercing, though fruitless sorrow, would he bewail his past pleasures! How many heavy curses would he heap upon this treacherous world, or rather his own treacherous passions, which to gratify themselves have betrayed him to eternal misery and torment! He would doubtless tell us, with the deepest anguish of a despairing soul, that were he master of ten thousand worlds, he would joyfully sacrifice them all for one hour of that time, of which we are as lavish as if it were of no value: He would embrace with joy, though it were for millions of years, the most rigid penance that ever was undergone, so he were but once more under a possibility of saving his soul.

This is undoubtedly the account he would give us of the other world, if he were permitted to utter his thoughts, and is, without dispute, a faithful representation of the ideas the souls departed have of the eternal state, in which they are now fixed, and towards which we are hastening as fast as the wings of time, and the short course of an uncertain perishable life can carry us.

And what remains then, but that we now begin whilst we have yet time, what we shall otherwise hereafter wish to have done, with a fruitless repentance of our having neglected to do it, whilst we had it in our power. Remember, *Christians*, and reflect seriously upon it, that you must once die. It is as certain, and as much above all dispute, as that you are now alive. God Almighty has decreed it from eternity, and his decrees are unchangeable as himself. Dying therefore, is a part you must act: But it depends upon your own free will, to make death a passage

sage to a happy or unhappy eternity. If you live well, God's grace will not abandon you in your last conflict, but strengthen you to *die the death of the just*, which is *precious in his sight*. But if you live ill, you run a dreadful hazard of being justly permitted, by Almighty God, to die as you lived.

It, therefore, highly concerns us all to make our whole life a continual preparation for death. This is the only end for which it was bestowed upon us, and for which it has been till now, and **is** still continued to us by the divine bounty. If hitherto we have not answered these purposes, it is now high time to think seriously of it; and how happy are we that it is still time! What a mercy is it that we have not been cut off, whilst we were guilty of mortal sin, which has been our case so often! Where should we now be, if this had happened to us, as it has to millions before us? Can we think of it without trembling? Can we think of it without a sense of gratitude to the infinite goodness that has preserved us, and a hatred to those sins which would have rendered us eternally unhappy? These are doubtless, the fruits which God's forbearance expects of us. This is the use we ought henceforward to make of it. And then death will cease to be an evil to us. For though death joined with sin be the greatest of evils, it is a real good without it, as being a secure passage to a happy eternity.

THE SECOND ENTERTAINMENT.

CONCERNING SOME GENERAL PREPARATIONS
FOR DEATH.

Blessed are these servants, whom the Lord, when he cometh, shall find watching, Luke xii. 37.

IN my last discourse, I furnished you with some considerations upon the certainty of death. But
this

this truth, though ever so evident and weighty, can be no farther useful to us, than as it has an influence upon the conduct of our lives. For what will it avail us to have a speculative persuasion that we must once die, unless we conclude practically from it, that it is therefore our duty as well as interest, to be always prepared for it?

This then is the immediate consequence to be drawn from it, *viz.* that since we are created to be happy, and our happiness depends upon dying well, it follows, that the principal business of life, ought to be a preparation for death. This is that *one, and only necessary thing*, which admits of no dispensation, and every thing in the world ought to yield, and be sacrificed to it. Ease, interest, honour, and pleasure are to be consulted no otherwise than as they have a reference to the general end of living and dying well. The subject then of this entertainment shall be, the general previous disposition required for the happy performance of this great work, that is, some general directions relating to the manner how we ought to dispose ourselves before-hand for death.

The prophet *Isaias* being sent by God to king *Ezekias*, to forewarn him of his approaching end, delivered his message in these words: *Put thy house in order, for thou shalt die, and thou shalt not live.* This advice of the prophet, *put thy house in order*, if literally taken, regards particularly those, who have their wills to make, or any temporal concerns to settle before they die; and calls very pressingly upon them, to prepare themselves for their last end, by an early discharge of this duty. For we may truly say, they are but very ill managers either of their spiritual or temporal concerns, who either out of sloth, or a
kind

kind of indolent temper, or upon any other frivolous motive, put off their making their wills to the last extremity: it being a business that requires a greater presence of mind than can be expected from a person labouring under the anguish of a mortal distemper. Besides, how easily may a dying man be imposed upon, by interested persons about him, at a time, when for a little ease, he is ready to consent to any thing that is suggested to him! And so it may, in effect, become their will instead of his: To say nothing of the unseasonableness of such a concern, at a time when his thoughts ought to look quite another way, and be wholly turned towards the other world, where he is then going to make his eternal abode.

But the ill consequences of these delays will yet appear more clearly, if we consider the hazard they expose a dying person to, of dying without making any will at all. For this is the unavoidable consequence, if he either happens to die suddenly, or to be out of his senses in his last sickness. And how fatal has this often proved to families, by engaging them in endless quarrels and law-suits! Nay, how prejudicial must it needs be to those, who have a just title to have some provision made for them, though perhaps not grounded upon any law that can compel the next heir to it, and are by this means privied of a necessary subsistence, whilst all is swept away by some one, who either deserves or wants it least, and will have no regard either to proximity of blood, or the intention of the party deceased, or the merits of those, whose past services entitle them to a gratification, as much as any human laws.

But as the making of *wills*, so the payment of *debts* is a duty not to be deferred to our last sickness.

sickness. Many have their hearts so set upon their money, that they cannot resolve to part with it till such time as they can keep it no longer. These therefore ought to consider, that a person in debt, is but another person's cash-keeper; and that the sum he owes, is but money deposited in his hands, which he cannot detain with justice any longer than he has the express or tacit consent of the party who has a right to it. So that when the creditor demands it with justice and reason, the debtor, if able, is under an obligation of conscience to pay it. Nay, he is bound to make himself able, as soon as he can, by retrenching all superfluous and unnecessary expences. After which all affected delays, are no better than so many repeated acts of injustice, which he cannot answer to God nor man. Nor will his resolving to discharge all debts, when he is called upon to pay the common debt of nature, be any plea in favour of this practice; because we are bound, not only to die, but live like honest men. And it is much to be suspected, that he who has not the heart to part with his money, but when he can keep it no longer, dies with a good will to have kept it longer if he could; which, considering that in the case before us, it implies injustice as well as avarice, is but a very ill disposition to accompany him to the other world.

I will therefore conclude this head, with repeating to you the prophet's advice; *put thy house in order*. Expect not the approach of death to settle the concerns of this life. Do justice to your neighbour, whilst it is a free and voluntary act; and it will be a comfort in your distress both to mind and body, to have no other business then upon your hands, than the performing well the last scene of life.

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However, besides this preparatory disposition, consisting in the regulation of the most important temporary concern, there is another *house* each Christian has to *put in order*, to dispose himself for death, *viz.* his own soul. And this is the great business of life, and undoubtedly challenges his principal care.

Consider therefore, Christian, what condition thy house is in. Examine every part of it with a diligent and impartial eye. Is thy *faith* built upon that *rock* which *Christ* speaks of? Is it proof against all storms of temptations and persecutions? Is there a foundation of *humility* laid deep enough to bear the superstructure of all other virtues? Are the *doors* and *windows* of thy house, I mean thy senses, strongly guarded against the assaults of vanity, and fleshly lusts? Does nothing appear on the outside, that may scandalize or offend thy neighbour?

But above all, let us consider how this house of ours is fitted within? Is it furnished suitable to the infinite dignity of the divine guest who is to lodge in it? Does the *Holy Ghost* make his constant abode there, or do we not often entertain his mortal enemy? Is it not frequently haunted with evil spirits, and God Almighty forsaken it? We may easily judge what state it is in, if we but reflect who governs, what order is kept, what regulations and methods are observed. Is there as good œconomy in our spiritual as temporal concerns? Is there as much care taken to preserve the life, health, and beauty of the soul, as of the body? Is there a time set apart for prayer, spiritual reading, examination of conscience, and other devotions, as well as for eating, sleeping, diversions and worldly employments? In a word, is *charity* or *self-love* mistress within? Does *reason* or *passion*, *justice*
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or *humour* bear the greatest sway ? If *self-love*, *passion*, and *humour* govern ; alas, it cannot be doubted, but the whole house is in disorder and confusion. And how unhappy is the soul, which death finds in this state !

But if *charity* be mistress, if *justice*, *reason*, and *religion* are consulted, in all concerns both spiritual and temporal, there is sufficient ground to judge our house is in good order, and we need not fear to be surprised by death ; for where *charity* is mistress of the heart, where *piety* and the *fear of God* take place of *passion* and *inclination*, there the *Holy Ghost* resides undoubtedly in the soul ; and where the divine guest makes his abode, all must be orderly and well-disposed. Such a soul is always prepared for her last summons. Death will indeed destroy her house of clay, but it is in order to translate her to those heavenly mansions, where all the virtues, which adorned her here below, and fitted her for the state of bliss, will be either rewarded, or receive their final accomplishment and perfection.

Whence it appears, that the preparation we are to make for death, is no other than that which is to fit us for Heaven. Now, nothing can fit us for Heaven, but what will be either rewarded or perfected in Heaven. *Faith* and *hope*, *patience* in adversity, *love of enemies*, *pardoning injuries*, and the like, are virtues, which, to speak properly, will not be perfected, but rewarded in Heaven. For, as divines teach, there is neither *faith* nor *hope* in Heaven. Because by *faith*, we only know God obscurely as through a mist or cloud, whereas in Heaven we shall see him *face to face*. *Hope* also, though ever so firm, is always mixed with some *fear* ; and regards a good not yet possessed ; whereas fruition, which is the reward of the life to come, is
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an actual possession of God, attended with such an infallible security, as excludes all fear or doubt. *Patience*, and *love of enemies*, can likewise have no place in Heaven; because in Heaven there are no *enmities* nor *crosses* to be suffered. However, these virtues are necessary to dispose us for Heaven, because its joys are the reward of them; and those can have no title to the reward, who comply not with the conditions upon which it is promised.

But there are other virtues, as *piety*, *humility*, *purity*, *conformity to the will of God*, and *charity* (the queen, or rather the life and soul of all virtues) which will not only be rewarded, but perfected in Heaven. So that whoever is void of these virtues at the hour of death, wants the dispositions that are requisite to qualify him for the state of bliss. The reason is evident, because the spiritual life of the just in this world differs nothing in substance from the eternal life of the saints in Heaven, since both the one and the other consist chiefly in the *knowledge* and *love of God*. But as the blessed in Heaven have a clear and perfecter knowledge of him, so is their love, and other virtues following from it, proportionably greater, and therefore differ indeed from those they possessed on earth, in their eminency and perfection, but not in their nature or substance.

Whence it follows, that when a soul adorned with these virtues leaves her earthly mansion, nothing more is requisite to render her eternally happy, but only to perfect those very gifts she brings with her, and give, as it were, the finishing stroke to the work of grace, so happily begun and carried on with perseverance in this life. But if none of these gifts or graces, which *glory*
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is to perfect, be found in her at her entrance into the other world, what other fate can she expect, than to be for ever excluded from that blessed state? For how can they pretend to the glory of the saints, who, neglecting in this life to lay the foundation of it, remain void of those necessary previous dispositions, by which the saints took care to fit themselves for it? Or how can they lay claim to the reward of virtue, who bring not with them the virtues to entitle them to it? 'Tis certainly a great delusion, to think to pass from a life defiled with sin, to a state wholly inconsistent with it. The saints and angels, who are without a spot or stain, will not admit into their blessed society but such as, like themselves, are pure and holy. Neither will Almighty God own them for coheirs to the crown and kingdom of his Son, who have wilfully renounced and not recovered the grace, that made them his *adopted children*. 'Tis to these unfortunate souls St. *Austin* addresses himself in the following words: *Brethren, we must know, that neither pride, nor avarice, nor luxury ascends with Christ: No vice of ours ascends with our heavenly physician.* For since the principal end of his coming into this world, was to cure the distempers of our souls, and render us thereby capable of eternal life, it follows, that they who not only neglect to make use of the remedies his goodness has provided for them, but seek rather to increase their distempers, can have no part with him. So that whoever cherishes any criminal passion, and continues in this way till his *exit* out of this life, whither, alas, must he go! Heaven will not receive him; neither are the flames of purgatory sufficient to cleanse him. No other place then remains for him, but that of everlasting horror and confusion;

on; where, being incapable of change, his soul will for ever remain under those very disorders, in which death found him.

I know there are many, who being engaged in some sinful habit, and terrified with the considerations of death and eternity, have frequent thoughts, and seemingly, at least, resolve to reform their lives. But, I know not how, their old habits, pressing daily hard upon them, and their sinful inclinations still gaining ground by being often gratified, these good thoughts and resolutions often come to nothing; nay, what is worse, serve only to lessen their fears, and betray them into a kind of security, by making them think themselves better than they really are, because they seemingly resolve to be so for the future. And thus they usually go on, until they are either surprised by a sudden and unprovided death, or at least reduced to the last and miserable shift of a death-bed repentance.

I hope this will never be the case of any one here present. However, let us now suppose, which God forbid, that any one of you should fall into your last sickness, whilst engaged in any vicious habit, as of cursing or swearing, drunkenness, impurity, or the like; do you rightly apprehend the consequence of it? If you do not, give me leave to represent it to you. The consequence is, that in the case supposed you have no other hazard for your soul's salvation than that of a death-bed repentance. The consequence is evident. For if a mortal distemper should seize you, whilst you are yet engaged in any habit of sin, all that you have to depend upon is that preparation, which your last sickness will allow you to make; and that I call a death-bed repentance.

You will say, perhaps, you have no thoughts of hazarding your soul upon so dangerous an
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after-game. I believe you have not ; but you deceive yourselves. For though you do not expressly design any such thing, the devil does. And if you pursue those very courses, which will most certainly, sooner or later, bring you to it, what matter is it, whether you design it or not ? No man designs expressly to damn himself ; and yet too many, God knows, study as effectually their own damnation, as if they expressly designed it. And so it happens in the case before us. For though very few are so desperately mad as to resolve expressly to hazard all upon a death-bed repentance, yet all those, who continue from year to year in their sinful habits, take almost as direct a way to it, as if they formed an express design of it. And therefore the devil is not so very solicitous to engage sinners in so desperate a resolution, because he finds his work almost as effectually done without it. Nay, he often seeks to amuse them with seeming resolutions of changing their lives in good time, so to hide them from the precipice into which they are running ; the dread whereof might frighten them into safer courses. All he has to do in the mean time, is to continue them on in their wonted relapses till their last sickness overtakes them ; and then the necessity of depending upon a death-bed repentance follows of course.

Let me therefore once more put this question to you, *Is your house in order ?* Are your souls in a readiness for death ? Would you be willing to be summoned to your last account this very day ? Have you already made a sufficient preparation for it ? Happy they who are so before-hand with the great work of salvation, that their last hour, whenever it comes, may find it fully finished.

THE

THE THIRD ENTERTAINMENT.

ON SUDDEN DEATHS.

Be watchful ; for ye know not the day nor hour,
Matt. xxv. 13.

THOUGH nothing be more certain than death, nothing is more uncertain than the time and circumstances of it. So that no man, though in the most perfect state of health can make any guess, whether death will come soon or late, whether it will be sudden or foreseen. And this, of all the circumstances hid from us, is the most frightful. For though the precise time of its coming were kept from our knowledge, yet if we were but sure it would not seize us on a sudden, this at least would be some comfort. But, alas ! this comfort is denied us ; and the reason why it is denied us is, because God will oblige us to be always watchful, and in a readiness for his summons at what time soever, and in what manner soever he shall please to call upon us.

For this reason, I say, God has concealed from us not only the time of our death, but every circumstance relating to it. So that of all the goods we possess in this world, life itself is the most uncertain, nor have we the least encouragement to build any security upon it. It may be taken from us when we think least of it, and in so sudden a manner as to leave us no interval of time between perfect health and the stroke of death. It is upon these terms we first entered into the world, and we continue in it upon the same uncertain footing. The subject then of this entertainment shall be the uncertainty of human life, and the many dangers to which it is exposed of being taken from us by a sudden death.

Death

Death being the punishment of sin, and all men since the fall of *Adam* being conceived in sin, it follows, that life is no sooner communicated to us, but we come within the general sentence of death, and are doomed to die even before we are born. Hence many pass immediately from the womb to the grave, and are never allowed to see the sun shine upon them. Others step no sooner into the world, but go off again immediately, as if they came upon no other business than to die. Others again, after having with much care and nursing gone through the most dangerous part of life, disappoint in a moment the flattering hopes of their tender parents, and become a prey to death, when they are just of age to begin to taste the pleasures of life.

It is true, great numbers survive this age, and have a longer lease of life allowed them. And most of us here present are bound to acknowledge the divine bounty, in having favoured us with this blessing. However, since sentence of death is already passed upon us, we are but in the condition of condemned criminals, reprieved until such time as it shall please the sovereign arbiter of life and death to give his orders for our execution. In the mean time, every step we make during the short course of this mortal life, brings us nearer to the grave: and it often happens, that whilst men are pleasing themselves with the thoughts of a long and merry life, they find themselves all of a sudden in the hands of death, and hurried to the other world at a time as unwelcome perhaps as unexpected.

This was the unhappy fate of the *Rich Man* mentioned in the gospel, who, whilst he was projecting how to indulge himself with the treasures he had laid up, was summoned to render
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his soul the very night he was amusing himself with these vain thoughts. This was also the unfortunate end of *Balthazar*, that proud king of *Babylon*; who, amidst his drunken cups, and profane night revels, but too often practised by our modern Christians, saw a hand upon the wall before him writing the sentence of his condemnation, which was accordingly executed upon him that very night.

How many have been struck dead in the very moment they were gratifying some criminal passion! How many have been called to the tribunal of God with the cups in their hands, or *blasphemy* or *perjury* in their mouths! In a word, how many have laid themselves down to sleep in as perfect health as any of us all, and never more saw the rising sun! Or risen in the morning as sound in body, as sick perhaps in soul, and have not been allowed to outlive that day.

Now the natural reason of this great uncertainty of human life is, first and chiefly the very structure of man's body, in regard of the incredible number and variety of parts, whereof it is composed: And amongst which many, particularly those which lodge and convey the blood and vital spirits from part to part, are so slender and weak, that it seems next to a miracle, that some of them are not broken with every sudden or violent motion of the body, and yet so necessary to the preservation of life, that the breaking of any may prove fatal to it.

So that man's body may be fitly compared to an artificial machine, composed of innumerable little springs and wheels, the stopping or breaking any of which either stops all the rest, or at least causes an irregularity in their motion, and puts the whole machine out of order. For just so it happens in man's body, which consisting
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of innumerable little parts of different sorts, and all depending upon each other, and contributing to the harmony of the whole ; if but any of them receive a hurt, or happens to be discomposed, the whole machine of the body is affected with it, and in danger of being destroyed.

Thus many have been killed with an inward bruise, the cutting of an artery, or breaking of a vein. Infomuch that anatomists, whose business it is to study the structure of human bodies, considering the prodigious number of veins, fibres, arteries, sinews, muscles, nerves, and other parts of which they are composed, assure us, that the unhappy end of those, who are taken away by sudden or untimely deaths, is more to be lamented than wondered at, and that we rather ought to be surpris'd that greater numbers fall not daily under the like misfortunes.

But besides the dependence our lives have upon the harmony of such numberless and different parts, that enter into the composition of man's body, they also depend upon several outward things, as *meat*, *drink*, *air*, and the like ; which often, instead of preserving them, are instrumental to their destruction. Thus when an epidemical distemper reigns, the air itself being for the most part infected, it is dangerous even to breathe, though we cannot live one moment without it. Thus death is often conveyed to us from the breath or cloaths of those we converse with. Thus, finally, many meet their death in the very *meat*, or *drink*, or *physic*, which they take to prevent it. May not a mortal fever be catch'd in a moment, and send the strongest man alive to his grave in a few days warning ? *Surfeits*, *pleurifies*, and *quinsies*, often make a quicker dispatch, and *apoplexies* give no warning at all.

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Add to all this the innumerable accidents which have no inward cause, but attack us from abroad, and cannot be prevented with the greatest caution possible; as the fall of a horse, the overturning of a coach, an accidental fire, or such as are occasioned by thunder, lightning, or violent storms. And are not some of these the daily ministers of sudden deaths? Do not the weekly bills of mortality of one great city only, furnish us almost continually, with some instances of this nature? So that with the frail structure of our bodies on the one hand, and the innumerable accidents to which they are exposed on the other, man's life hangs by so weak and slender a thread, that nothing but the greatest blindness and stupidity imaginable can make us hazard our eternal salvation on the long continuance of it.

It is certain, that considering both the greatness of the hazard, and the eternal consequences depending upon it, there needs no more to oblige all men, that are not wholly lost to faith and reason, to live with the same watchfulness and precaution, as if they were infallibly assured, that a sudden death would be their lot some time or other. We ought indeed to pray and hope it will not: But it is most certain, no man can have a positive security against it. For since the natural and immediate causes are either the usual accidents from abroad, against which there is no shelter, or the inward dispositions of the body, which are so hidden and secret, that no man can tell how near the danger threatens, what manner of assurance can any man have, that a sudden death will not be his destiny?

It is true, there is an over-ruling providence, which governs all things, *reaches strongly from end to end, and disposes all things sweetly*: So that,

as *Christ* himself assures us, there falls not even a single hair from our heads but by his orders. Our mortal bodies, as they are God's workmanship no less than our immortal souls, so are they no less the object of his care. And though we ourselves are, under him, entrusted with the management of them, and are bound to perform our parts to the utmost of our power, yet since we are but as instruments under his direction, it is the same invisible and unerring hand, by which they were first formed, that now rules and guides them; and can, if it pleases, conduct them safe through all the stages of human life, to the natural end of their mortal race. And therefore, it is not to be questioned, but Almighty God, who is the supreme cause, and first mover of all things, has it in his power to dispose natural causes so, as to preserve us from all accidents of sudden and untimely deaths.

All this, I say, is true, and it is the greatest comfort good Christians have, to consider that they live under the conduct and protection of an all-ruling providence, which will not permit any thing to happen to them, but what may contribute to their greater good, and the security of their eternal welfare; so that the many perils wherewith they live encompassed, serve only to excite their fervour in good works, and encrease their trust and confidence in God, to whom they cry out with full assurance, in these words of the *Psalmist*, *Though I shall walk in the shade of death, I will fear no evil, because thou art with me.*

But in all this, there is not the least encouragement or comfort for ill livers; and their case is in all respects as different as their lives from that of the just. The reason hereof is very plain; because, though there be a *general providence,*

vidence, that extends itself to all mankind, yet there is besides a *special* one, which only regards God's faithful servants, and in which ill livers have no share. The three *Israelites* walked in the *Babylonian furnace* as in a refreshing air, whilst those who kindled the flames, were consumed by them. *Daniel* was as safe in the midst of *lions*, as in the company of *lambs*; whereas his accusers could scarce reach the ground, before they were devoured by them. It is true, these events being miraculous, no general rule can be drawn from them. But whether God makes use of supernatural means, or employs natural causes to bring about the designs of his providence, the effect is the same; and though we see not manifest miracles, it is not to be doubted, but God disposes natural causes so if in favour of his faithful servants, as to protect them from a thousand accidents, in which they would have perished, without his special providence watching over them.

But suppose a sudden death should be the lot of a just man, as it sometimes comes to pass, and has happened even to great saints, we can look upon it no otherwise than a providential mercy upon him; Almighty God making use of this way to preserve him from the usual terrors of death, to hasten his passage to a better life, and perhaps to prevent his falling into occasions, which might have drawn him into sin. But to ill livers a sudden death is always an irreparable evil; since it deprives them in an instant of every thing in which they placed their happiness in this life, and throws them into a state of endless misery and torments. So that the very same thing, which may be a mercy to the just, and turn to their greater good, as all things do by the secret dispensation of providence,

dence, is on the contrary the severest judgment that can fall upon sinners. And yet these very persons, who alone have reason to apprehend a sudden death, are they who usually fear it the least: And the reason why they fear it the least, is not their courage, but stupidity: They choose rather to hazard dying any way without thinking of it, than to disturb their pleasures with the thought of so ungrateful an object: And so it naturally follows, that as they seldom or never think of death, they are the most liable to be surpris'd by it.

But what way soever we consider sudden deaths, whether with regard to natural or supernatural causes, it is manifest, that none have greater reason to apprehend their perishing that way, than they whose disorderly lives deserve no better end, and are often the natural occasion of it. How many have perished in unjust quarrels, occasioned by luxury and gaming or night revels! How many destroy themselves by excessive debauches! Or, by a long course of irregularities, lay a train of natural dispositions, whence apoplexies or other immediate causes of sudden death, are gradually formed?

But let us suppose the strength of their natural constitution renders them proof against accidents of that nature, (of which however no man can be sure) what shelter have they against misfortunes that may surprize them from abroad? If they say they are upon as good a footing as the rest of mankind, this is a great mistake, unless they mean that part of mankind which is as bad as themselves. Pious Christians are under the special protection of Almighty God, and if they die suddenly, death renders them eternally happy; to both which advantages ill livers have forfeited their title. They are God's enemies,
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and as they have withdrawn themselves from the order established by his holy law, so he withdraws from them the benefit of that peculiar providence, with which he watches over his obedient servants. So that when the time is come, in which he designs to make any of them examples of his justice, he abandons them to their unhappy state. He neither keeps danger at a distance from them, nor removes them out of the reach of danger. And though in all this there appears nothing out of the ordinary course of nature, yet the execution of these criminals is as particularly ordered by the divine justice, as if the hand of God appeared visibly in it: His infinite wisdom disposing natural causes in such a manner as to give them an infallible tendency to the end for which they are designed. But whatever name we give to sudden deaths of this nature, whether we call them *accidents* or *judgments*, according as they have a reference to several causes, they are equally fatal in their consequences, and the punishment is equally severe, whether it be immediately inflicted by the hand of God, or occasioned by what we call *accident*, because eternal death is the infallible consequence of it.

However, that there may be no room left to doubt, but that the sudden death of sinners may be regarded as a designed punishment of their ill lives, the word of God threatens them expressly with it, as is manifest from St. Paul's Epistle to the *Thessalonians*, Chap. v. Ver. 3. where he tells them, *That death shall seize upon the wicked like a thief in the night: And when they shall say peace and safety, then sudden destruction shall come upon them, as travail upon a woman with child, and they shall not escape.* And our Saviour says no less in the twenty-fourth chapter of St.

Matthew; where, having exhorted his disciples to be watchful, he proposes to them the parable of the good and wicked servant, which he concludes with these remarkable words: *But if the evil servant shall say in his heart, my lord delays his coming, and shall begin to smite his fellow-servants, and eat and drink with the drunken; the lord of that servant shall come in the day when he looks not for it, and in the hour that he is not aware of: and shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites, where there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.* From which words it plainly appears, that sudden deaths ought many times to be considered not barely as the effect of accident or constitution, but as a particular punishment of sin—a just revenge upon sinners; God in his secret judgments ordering it so, that they, who in the course of their lives neglected the ordinary means to dispose themselves for death, should in the end want the opportunity and benefit of a particular preparation for it.

But, O good God! what tongue is able to express the fatal consequences of such a death! What becomes of a soul charged with the guilt of mortal sin at the moment of her separation from the body! She is hurried in an instant to the dreadful tribunal, receives her irrevocable doom, is banished from the sight of God, and plunged into hell-fire; where shame and despair, horror and confusion, remorse without ease, and torments without comfort, are to be her everlasting portion.

O God, preserve us from this misfortune. Let any but that which is irreparable happen to us. Enable us with thy grace to live so, that we may die the death of the just; and conduct us through whatever ways thou pleatest, so they but bring us to the happy end for which we are created.

THE

THE FOURTH ENTERTAINMENT.

SOME PRACTICAL INFÉRENCES DRAWN FROM THE
UNCERTAINTY OF HUMAN LIFE AND THE DAN-
GER OF SUDDEN DEATH.

Be watchful, for ye know not the day nor hour,
Matt. xxv. 13.

HAVING, in my last discourse, laid before you the uncertainty of human life, the weak foundation upon which it is built, how many accidents may rob us of it, and, what is most frightful, how little security we have that it will not be snatched from us by a sudden death; it remains now to improve these truths, by drawing some instructive inferences from them, which shall be the subject of this entertainment.

The first instructive inference to be drawn from the uncertainty of human life is, that we ought not to set our hearts upon any thing in this world. For is it not a folly to set our hearts upon things which death may rob us of every moment, and will certainly take away from us some time or other? It is the argument our Saviour made use of to his disciples, to wean their hearts from the world, and turn their affections towards heaven. *Lay not up treasures* (says Christ) *for yourselves upon earth, where the moth and the worms do corrupt, and where thieves break in and steal.* For what wise man would be solicitous to lay up treasures, or set his heart upon them, if he were sure they were all to become a prey to thieves? Now death is the great thief, who always lies in wait for us, and will sooner or later rifle all our worldly goods, and strip us naked of whatever we possess. For we must all go as naked out of the world, as we first entered into it. Honours, riches, pleasures, friends and relations, all must be left behind;

only our works, whether good or bad, will stick to us, and accompany us to the tribunal of God, either to condemn or save us. So that the whole world perishes as effectually to every dying man, as if it were at that instant reduced to ashes. And is not then a notorious folly to set our hearts upon it, or love any thing in it to the prejudice of our eternal salvation?

For this reason St. *Paul* writes thus to the *Corinthians*: *This, therefore, brethren, I say unto you, time is short. It remains then that both those, who have wives, be as if they had them not; and those who rejoice, be as if they rejoiced not; and those who buy, be as if they possessed not; and those who use this world, be as if they used it not; for the figure of the world passes,* 1 Cor. vii. 29, 30, 31. By which words he exhorts them to keep their hearts so free and disengaged from all inordinate affections to the things of this life, that even amidst the possession and use of them, they may enjoy the same liberty of spirit, as if they had effectually renounced both the one and the other.

For the same reason St. *Peter* exhorts all Christians to be as *pilgrims* or *travellers* in this world; because as travellers, though they make use of conveniencies they meet with upon the road, yet have always principally an eye upon the proposed end of their journey, so Christians ought to have their thoughts so turned towards death, and the world to come, which is in the end of their journey, that whilst they use indeed the things of this life, according to the order of providence, that is, within the bounds of necessity or reasonable convenience, their hearts may still remain free, or, as St. *Peter* expresses it, *abstain from fleshly lusts*, that is, from all sorts of inordinate love, or immoderate desire of creatures.

tures. And truly, since all inordinate affections are contrary to the Christian spirit, and an obstacle to salvation, this alone ought to be motive enough to keep our hearts free from them. But the difficulties they will one day add to the natural terrors of death, is a no less powerful consideration to make us apply ourselves to an entire disengagement from all clogs of this nature. To die, is in itself a terrible thing; nature startles at the thought of it, and the fear of judgment very much increases its terror; but to die with a heart full of love of the world, is frightful beyond imagination.

This appeared plainly in the unfortunate *Agag*, who having wallowed in all the pleasures of a voluptuous life, when he saw himself just ready to fall a sacrifice to the divine vengeance, cried out with the deepest anguish of mind, *Does bitter death separate so?* For what a racking thought must it needs be to a lover of this world, when feeling himself at the point of death, he considers that he must now be in a moment torn away from all those things, in which he has till then placed all his happiness, content, and satisfaction! He has till then been passionately fond of pleasures, and now he must enjoy them no more. He has set his heart upon riches, and now he must leave them all behind. He has made some wretched creature the idol of his passion, and now he finds himself condemned to an eternal separation from that object. O! could we but see the heart of a person dying under these unhappy circumstances, we should there discover a frightful scene of terror, grief and anguish. We should find there fully verified this saying of *Eccl.* *O Death, how bitter is thy memory to a man, who places his content in the enjoyment of his wealth!* So that to enter-

tain or nourish in ourselves any worldly passion, or violent inclination, is in effect to nourish a viper, which will one day gnaw our very bowels. It is to prepare the torture for ourselves, and sow the seeds of future dejection and despair: Which, though stifled amidst the business, amusements, and diversions of life, will not fail to produce their full effect at the terrible approach of death. And therefore since we are uncertain how near we are already to it, we ought to lose no time, but hasten all we can to remove from our hearts all such inordinate affections, as are most like to encrease the difficulties of our last hour, and heighten the terrors which death brings naturally with it: And this, as I have said, is the first practical inference to be drawn from the uncertainty of human life.

The second is, that we ought to set a great value upon the time present, and manage it with the utmost care. For since time is given us by God for the gaining of eternity, it follows, that if we but manage it as we ought, we may improve it into an infinite good, because an infinite good may be purchased with it: And this suffices to shew it is a treasure of inestimable value. But if we farther consider, that the possession of this inestimable treasure is wholly uncertain, and cannot be secured to us by any power under heaven, even for one single day, as being liable to all the accidents to which man's life is exposed; it is plain we cannot, without manifest folly, and the hazard of losing all, neglect the improvement of those precious moments, whereof we are actually in possession. For if we esteem those little better than fools, who wilfully let slip an opportunity of any considerable temporal advantage, because the like may perhaps never be offered again; how great
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a folly must we then judge those guilty of, who having it in their power to lay up treasure for eternity, either trifle away the opportunity that is given to them, or employ it to their own infinite prejudice, when at the same time they are not only uncertain how soon it may be taken from them; but are also sure, that when it is once lost, it is never more to be recovered! This certainly is a folly not to be paralleled, and as far beyond all example now, as the fatal consequences of it will be without remedy hereafter. Oh! what a stabbing thought it is to the damned souls in hell to reflect that *time will be no more!* A thousand daggers would not half so sensibly stab as this one single thought. It is the everlasting *worm*, that gnaws them without intermission, and gives a double sting to all their torments.

Consider therefore that time, if it be managed as it ought, is the richest jewel we possess; that the continuance of it is wholly uncertain; that at best we cannot hold it very long, and when it is once lost, it is lost for ever. Whence we must conclude, according to my second inference, that as the time present, of which alone we are secure, challenges our highest value, so we ought to manage it to the best advantage of our souls, both in order to redeem, as well as we can, what is yet to come, as to make it fully answer all the great ends, for which it is to be bestowed upon us.

But since life is not only uncertain, but may also end in a sudden death, there remains a third inference to be drawn particularly from this consideration; and it is our Saviour's own inference contained in these words, *Be watchful, for ye know not the day nor the hour.* We ought therefore to be so watchful over ourselves, as never
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to be unprovided. For though there be no fence against a sudden death, yet every Christian may secure himself against an unprovided one, since every one has it in his power to live so, as to be always prepared; whereas, if he be at any time unprepared, he exposes himself to all the fatal consequences of a sudden death, because it may happen to him, whilst he is in that condition. For which reason our blessed Saviour, as he frequently forewarned his disciples of the suddenness of his future coming, representing it under diverse parables or similitudes, to imprint the more lively idea of it in their hearts, so he generally concluded his discourses relating to that subject with this admonition, *Be therefore watchful, for ye know not the day nor hour.*

Who would not think indeed, but that so express an admonition, delivered by Christ himself, nay, and inculcated with such frequent repetitions, should abundantly suffice to cure men of the deepest lethargy, and awake them into the greatest care and watchfulness over themselves? Considering especially the dreadful mischiefs that attend the neglect of it. But, alas! the case is quite otherwise; for is there any thing more directly opposite to the watchfulness required of us than the state of mortal sin! wherein whoever dies is lost without remedy. And yet how many continue in this unhappy state wittingly, and knowingly, I will not say for many days, weeks, or months, but even years together! Nay, are they not as gay and unconcerned under it, as if every thing were as safe and as well as they could wish? O God, what a blindness and infatuation is this! that men who believe there is another world to come, wherein the just will be eternally rewarded, and the

the wicked eternally punished, should have the boldness to hazard themselves in a state, from which, if death should seize them in it, they must immediately pass to everlasting torments!

What is it that makes men run thus desperately upon their own eternal ruin? How comes this contradiction in their nature, that being such lovers of themselves, they are at the same time such enemies to their own true happiness? How comes it that, that hating and flying above all things whatever is painful, they are not awed with the fear of *Hell-fire*? Is it the hopes of atoning for all by a future repentance? Alas! how many have been deceived and utterly lost that way? How many have we either personally known or heard of, who, depending upon the like presumptuous hope, have at length been either hardened in sin before they came to die, or suddenly cut off in the midst of all their disorders? For truly to run on in a wilful course of sin, upon a project of making all scores clear by an after-repentance, looks so like laying a design to baffle the divine justice, and get Heaven by a cheat, that God seems, as it were, bound in justice to defeat the wicked policy of such insolent sinners, by disappointing their presumption, and refusing them the mercy, which they abused into an encouragement of sin.

The book of *Judges* furnishes me with an historical passage, very applicable to my present purpose. It is the relation of the tragical end of *Sisera*; king *Jabin's* general, who having been for about twenty years the scourge of God upon the *Israelites*, was marching against them at the head of a formidable army. The *Israelites*, in this their distress, had recourse to God's mercy; who, hearing their prayers, ordered them to meet

meet their enemy with a body of ten thousand men under the command of *Barach*.

Sifera, whose army was much superior in number, and flushed with a long course of prosperous success, reckoned surely upon the victory. But he found his death where he thought to meet a triumph; for the battle was no sooner begun, but God struck his whole army with a panic, fear, and general consternation; inso-much that *Sifera* himself, being also seized with terror, betook himself to flight, whilst the *Israelites* broke in upon and destroyed his whole army.

As *Sifera* was thus endeavouring to save himself by flight, a woman named *Jabel* offered him her house for sanctuary, which he willingly accepted of; for he thought himself out of danger. Wherefore being much fatigued, he desired some refreshment, drank heartily, and laid himself down to sleep. But it cost him very dear; for *Jabel* perceiving him fast asleep, struck a nail through his head, fastened him to the ground, and delivered up his body to *Barach*, who was in pursuit of him.

This is a lively figure of the unhappy end of but too many sinners. They are God's enemies, and, as I may say, at open war against him; he permits them to prosper in this life, and his patience and long forbearance, instead of moving them to repentance, makes them grow insolent and flatter themselves with a false security; in this condition they *drink iniquity like water*; they fall into a lethargic sleep, and their hearts are, as it were, nailed to the earth. God's wrath is in the mean time in close pursuit of them; death suddenly overtakes them, and delivers them up to the divine justice. And so those miserable wretches are at length awakened by the scorching
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ing flames of Hell, whom neither the advice of friends or ghostly father, nor God's secret inspirations, nor the loud thunder of his threats could awake, whilst they were yet in a condition to prevent the fatal blow by a timely repentance.

Oh! let their misfortune be at least a warning to us. Let their past follies be our instruction. It is better to grow wise at the expence of others, than by our own experience. Nay, if we should tread in their footsteps, and miscarry the same way, our folly will be the more unpardonable, in suffering ourselves to be shipwrecked upon a rock, which has so many marks set upon it. Oh! if any of those miserable souls, who are now burning in the flames of Hell, could but obtain, with all their tears and bitter sufferings, the bare remainder of this very day, what price, what value would they set upon it! How solicitous would they be not to let one moment of it slip unprofitably out of their hands! And why then will we not resolve to take the same method! Why will any one be so bent upon his own destruction as to run on blindly in a course, which brought them, and will at length bring him, to everlasting misery and torments? For since the same means tend naturally to the self-same end, can any one pretend to act the same unhappy part as they did, and be in no danger of being involved in the same misfortune? Can he presume to go to Heaven, by walking in that path which brought them to Hell? Or has he power of life and death more in his hands than they had? Is he not liable to the same accidents as they, and may not death surprize him, as it did them?

You will say, perhaps, it is true, it is not impossible but you may die suddenly: However,
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since this happens but to few, it is more probable you will have warning to prepare yourselves beforehand. But do we argue at this wild rate, when any temporal concern is at stake? You all know very well, that in securing land or money, all accidents possible are nicely considered, and the very same measures and precautions taken, as if it were certain that they would happen. And why then should we be less cautious in the business of our eternal salvation! Why will we put it to an hazard at all, when we have it in our power to secure it absolutely! For allowing it to be less probable, it is possible, at least, we may die suddenly. And is not that enough, considering what lies at stake! Is not that, I say, enough to oblige us to take the safest course we can to prevent the fatal consequences of it in case it should happen! For whatever is possible, though barely possible, may absolutely happen; and if it should happen while we are in sin, let us reflect seriously what the consequence will be: Because if what we hazard by being in a state of sin were either of small moment, or being once lost might be again recovered, the case would be much altered. But we must consider, that the thing we expose to doubtful event, being in that state, is not only of the highest value imaginable, and surpasses infinitely all the treasures of this world, but if we once lose it, the loss is irreparable; nay, over and above, the miseries we hazard to throw ourselves into, are inexpressible and without remedy. And therefore of whatever nature the cause may be, that can bring such a misfortune upon us, whether probable or barely possible, it is a madness to be ever unprepared for it.

I shall therefore repeat once more the important admonition of Christ, which we must consider

sider as addressed to ourselves ; *Be watchful, for ye know not the day nor hour.* Let no man depend either upon youth or health ; for neither youth nor health can afford any security against the stroke of death. We may be in perfect health to day, and dead to-morrow. Nay, many thousands have been in perfect health the very hour or moment before they fell into Hell-fire. But if we desire an infallible security against all possibility of being surpris'd by death, nothing can procure us that happiness but a well ordered conscience, and the friendship of Almighty God. For whoever enjoys that blessing, may indeed die suddenly, but cannot be surpris'd by death, as being always in a readiness for it.

THE FIFTH ENTERTAINMENT.

DIFFICULTIES ATTENDING A DEATH-BED REPENTANCE.

Delay not to be converted to the Lord, and put it not off from day to day, Eccles. v. 8.

FROM what has hitherto been said concerning the uncertainty of the time and other circumstances of death on the one hand, and the many dangers and sudden accidents to which we live expos'd on the other, it appears plainly that they, who continue in a custom of living in a sinful state, run a very great hazard either of dying without any preparation at all, or at the best of being reduced to the last shift of depending wholly upon that preparation which their last sickness will allow them, and which we usually call a *death-bed repentance* ; which being generally looked upon as a most dangerous after-game, in a concern of the highest nature, shews the importance of the advice dictat'd by
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the Holy Ghost in these sacred words, *Delay not to be converted to the Lord, and put it not off from day to day.*

Here then is the proper place to examine, what judgment we ought to make of the repentance of a dying man; that is, whether a person who has neglected the means of salvation in time of health, and run on in a course of sinful practices till he falls into his last sickness, be then in any tolerable condition to accomplish the great work of a sincere reconciliation to God.

However, I am far from intending either to extenuate the power of God's *grace*, or set bounds to his *mercy*. For I know that neither the one or the other is to be measured by our short line. His *grace* can change the most corrupt heart in an instant, and his *mercy* never rejects a heart truly changed. And for that reason the most profligate sinner upon earth, though reduced to the very last extremity, ought never to despair. Because he knows not but the same infinite goodness that received a thief at the last gasp into favour, may also be moved to have compassion on him in that extremity.

The question therefore is not, whether a person, reduced to these unhappy circumstances, is bound to hope in God's mercies, and do what he can to be reconciled to him; for this admits of no dispute; because, though, he has lived an unchristian life, he is bound to do his best to prepare himself for a Christian death. But since the preparation for such a death cannot be without a sincere *love of God*, and a true *hatred of sin*, both which must be the effect of *grace*, the whole question is reduced to this one single point, *viz.* whether a person, who has always lived a stranger to the virtues of *repentance*, and the *love of God*, and being accustom-

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ed for many years to resist the motions of grace, will in his last sickness be favoured with such an extraordinary assistance, as will enable him in that state of terror, pain, and anguish, to work a total change in the disposition of his soul.

It is very true, the thing is not impossible, because no wound is incurable to the omnipotent hand of God, and therefore ought not to be despaired of by the unfortunate party, who has run the hazard of it. But as it is a heinous crime to despair at any time of God's mercy, so it is the highest strain of madness in any person to lay before-hand a design of depending upon an extraordinary grace, and reduce himself to a state, in which nothing under such a blessing can save him. My business then at present is to shew, that a death-bed conversion, after a sinful life continued to a person's last sickness, is nothing less than the effect of an extraordinary grace, and by consequence not to be depended on.

To make it appear that the conversion of a sinner upon his death-bed, is the effect of an extraordinary grace, it will be requisite to let you know what I mean by an extraordinary grace. I say, then that an extraordinary grace is that which is bestowed without the use of the ordinary means ordained by God for the obtaining of it; because, though all grace whatsoever be a pure gift of God, he rarely bestows the grace of a total and sincere conversion, but on those who employ the means ordained by him to dispose themselves for it. So that when a sinner is converted without the previous use of those means, his conversion is extraordinary, and by consequence the effect of an extraordinary grace.

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Now then, to shew that a death-bed repentance is a conversion of this kind, we must examine two things: 1. What are the ordinary means of a sinner's conversion. And, 2. Whether a dying man be in a condition to put these means in practice; for if he be not, it is evident he has nothing but an extraordinary grace to depend upon. As to the extraordinary means of a sinner's conversion, they are mostly reduced under these four heads, of *prayer*, *spiritual reading*, *consideration*, and the use of the *sacraments*. For let us suppose a person yet in perfect health, should, after having lived in an habitual practice of vices, apply himself to a spiritual director, to consult with him the means of saving his soul, what method would he advise him to? It is not to be doubted but he would in the *first* place exhort him to retire for some time at least as much as would be possible, from company and worldly business, in order to get leisure and opportunity to pour forth his soul before God in the exercise of *prayer*.

2dly. He would advise him to join frequent *consideration* with spiritual reading; and all this by way of preparatory exercise, to work him by degrees into a hearty detestation of his life past, and dispose him for the benefit of the *sacraments*.

And to shew how necessary it is to use this method in the case supposed, we need but compare the condition of a soul corrupted with a long habit of sin, with that of a person labouring under an ill habit of body. For as in this case no skilful physician will pretend to cure the party concerned in a dose or two, but will oblige him to enter into a regular course of physic, and prescribe him a uniform method of exercise and diet, by means whereof the mass of blood
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may by degrees be corrected, and the cause of the distemper removed; so, in the case of a soul all over-vitiated with sin, a few doses of spiritual physic will profit but little; but a continuance and regular course of remedies is necessary.

It is true, if the sacraments worked their effect without any previous dispositions on the part of the penitent, a few minutes would do as well as many months or years: For then whoever had but time enough to confess, and have his absolution pronounced before the breath went out of his body, would die in the state of salvation. But the case is quite otherwise. There are preparatory dispositions essentially necessary to qualify the penitent for the grace of the sacraments. For the heart must be truly changed, and the will effectually turned, from the irregular *love of creatures*, to the *love of God* above all things.

Now this is a difficult work, and requires both time and application, more or less, in proportion to the malignity of the distemper, and the root it has taken. For grace works by degrees like nature, and as it usually hides itself under the operation of mere natural causes, so it conforms itself, for the most part, to their way of operating, and seldom brings any thing to perfection on a sudden. And therefore, when God Almighty mercifully designs to recover an old sinner from the ill state he is in, the first disposition he usually gives him, is to inspire him with an earnest desire of his cure; because the desire of any good, naturally spurs us on to procure the means in order to it. But though this desire, which is the first step towards a sinner's conversion, be ever so hearty, it is usually very imperfect for some time as to its motive; being
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for the most part wholly influenced at first, by mere selfish considerations, such as are the uneasiness of a troubled conscience, the apprehension of God's judgment, the fear of hell-fire, and the like: And all this may be without any *hatred of sin*, for its own sake, that is, purely as it is an *offence to God*.

However, Almighty God makes use of this servile fear, in order to alarm him into a concern and solicitude about the means to shake off the burden that oppresses him, and to prevent the evils wherewith he is threatened. This concern and solicitude about the means of his cure, obliges him to have recourse to his spiritual physician, and follow his directions as to the method of praying, reading, meditating, and the like. By often reading and thinking upon Christian truths, lively ideas of them are insensibly formed, and deeply fixed in his mind: His understanding receives daily new light: His eyes are opened by degrees, and begin to see the vanity of worldly pleasures; the grievousness and enormity of sin; the infinite goodness of God; his love in having sent his only Son to deliver him from the bondage of sin and slavery of the Devil; his unwearied patience in having borne so long with him, and unspeakable mercy in not having cut him off in the midst of his disorders, but still inviting him to repentance.

These considerations, as they sink deeper and deeper into his mind, work proportionably upon the will. His heart is affected with them, and takes a new bent. The love of the world, and its sinful pleasures, goes off insensibly, and a better love enters in by the same degrees. What was at first begun upon motives of mere servile fear, he now carries on upon higher considerations. His heart is softened into compunction,

tion, his soul is sensibly afflicted with the thoughts of having lived so long an enemy to God: He laments his misfortune in having so often offended his infinite goodness: He pours himself forth in affections of love, admiration, and thanksgiving; detests his past sins, resolves to avoid all the occasions of them, makes hearty purposes of amendment, is ready to submit to any penitential works to satisfy the divine justice, and with these happy dispositions approaches to the sacred tribunal, in order to receive the infinite blessing of reconciliation with his heavenly Father.

Thus we see what are the ordinary means appointed by God for the beginning, improving, and perfecting the great work of a sinner's conversion; and the degrees through which he usually passes in making his advances towards it. Now let us consider, whether a person that has neglected all these means in time of health, and run on to his very last sickness in all his accustomed disorders, and habits of sin: whether, I say, he be then in any tolerable condition to put them in practice. For if he be not, he has nothing but an extraordinary grace to depend upon, as I have already said.

And, *first*, as to the duty of *prayer*, I only desire any one to reflect how little he is able to perform in that kind, if he be but under some uneasiness of mind, or a little out of order with the head-ach, or any other trivial indisposition. And how then can we be so senseless as to imagine, that a person seized with a mortal distemper, should be capable of praying with any tolerable attention! for what comparison is there between a slight indisposition, which only affects some one particular part, and a mortal distemper, which usually puts the whole body into a violent

violent ferment, and spreads an universal uneasiness and anguish over every part of it. It is evident, that the one must be by many degrees a greater hindrance than the other, to any business that requires thought and presence of mind. And, therefore, since we find by experience that the infirmity of the spirit is so great, that it is apt to be overcome even by the lesser opposition of the body, there is but little reason to presume, it will have strength enough to bear up against obstacles that are without all comparison greater.

But as a person in his last sickness is but in a very ill condition to *pray* as he ought, so is he much less capable of reading; the benefit whereof, and the influence it has upon a sinner's conversion, is sufficiently known by experience. But this point is so clear that it needs no proof. For to put books into a dying man's hands is a thing without example. And here we find him under the greatest disadvantage possible, in being deprived of one of the principal helps to salvation; it being this exercise that should furnish him with proper subjects for consideration, and such reflections, as might insensibly work his soul into a truly penitential disposition, and lead him through all the degrees of a solid conversion.

But this, you will say, may in some measure be supplied by others reading to him. I own something of this may be allowed; but then, how many hindrances are usually intervening in a person's last sickness to obstruct the fruit of it! As frequent visits of friends, the attendance and tears of relations about the sick man's bed, which usually affect him more sensibly than the most moving spiritual lectures. Then doctors and apothecaries must frequently be sent for; and

and the nurse is every now and then busy about him, and telling him that too much reading may hurt his head, or hinder his repose, and the like. So that in the winding up of the bottom, all the reading to help him will amount to no more than some unconnected scraps of spiritual lectures; which though not altogether unuseful to such pious souls, as only stand in need of some little helps to stir up their hearts, already well disposed, and revive the pious ideas that have ever been familiar to them, will, I fear, prove to be of very little use to those, who are yet full of worldly passions, all over corrupted with habits of sin, and stand in need of the most powerful remedies to work an effectual cure.

However, suppose the hindrances from abroad should not be so great as they are here represented, are not the pains of a dying man alone, sufficient to hinder him from receiving any considerable impression from what is said or read to him at that time? For how should he receive impressions from what he cannot attend to? Or how should he be capable of any serious attention, when all his thoughts are forcibly drawn another way? Now, is not this the case of those who are under any violent pain? It is doubtless so. For it is the proper nature of pain, to divert the soul from all other objects, and draw her whole application to itself. Hence it is that *praying, reading, and meditating*, are exercises that cannot be well performed, but when the body is in some measure at ease; because all these exercises require a composure and presence of mind; and nothing affects the mind more immediately, either for its advantage or disadvantage, than the disposition of the body; so that if the body be disturbed with pains, it immediately communicates its disturbance to the mind;

and a mind disturbed can scarce think of any thing but the cause of its disturbance.

Now then since it is evident, that the circumstances of a dying man are such, as unqualify him in a great measure for all the preparatory exercises, that are the ordinary means to dispose him for the sacrament of reconciliation, does it not manifestly follow, that the conversion of a sinner, under these unhappy circumstances, can be nothing less than the effect of an extraordinary grace? The consequence is clear and undeniable. Because, where ordinary means fail, nothing but an extraordinary power can supply the defect. And I leave you now to judge, whether a sinner has any reason to presume before-hand, that God will in his last extremity favour him with a conversion of that nature.

The word of God has forewarned us not to depend upon it. I shall only quote *St. Paul*, who, writing to the *Corinthians*, lays down this general maxim, *That the end of sinners will be according to their works.* He repeats it again in his epistle to the *Galatians*, ch. vi. where he tells them, that every man shall reap as he has sown. Which imports the same thing, nay, expresses it in a most significant metaphor. *Be not deceived*, says he, *God is not mocked. What a man soweth, that also shall he reap. He that soweth in his flesh, shall reap corruption; but he that soweth in the spirit, shall reap life everlasting,* Gal. vi. 6, 7. So that according to the rule of *St. Paul*, men generally die as they lived; and there is but too much reason to judge of the success of the one by the method of the other.

It is true, there is scarce any general rule without an exception. But the whole body of the Old and New Testament affords but one single instance, that looks favourably upon death-

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bed penitents, I mean the conversion of the thief upon the cross; which was doubtless, the effect of an extraordinary grace. And St. *Austin*, to prevent all presumption on that score, has marked out so many material circumstances, which favoured the conversion of that happy sinner, and are altogether foreign to the case before us, that is, of those who drive off their repentance in hopes of a like mercy, that I fear the example will afford them but little encouragement. His words are these:

“ Dearly beloved, lest perhaps the sudden happiness of the believing thief on the cross, should make any of you too secure and remiss; lest any one should say in his heart, my guilty conscience shall not trouble me; my sinful life shall not make me sad, because I see a thief obtained the pardon of all his sins in a moment: we must consider in that thief, not barely the shortness of his faith and confession, but the greatness of his fervour, and the circumstances of time, when even the perfectest were staggering.—The Devil inspires you with this security to bring you to ruin. For he deceives himself, and makes a jest of his own damnation, who, persisting in sin, imagines God will assist him in his last extremity.—The happy thief, of whom I have spoken, neither designedly staved off from time to time the business of salvation, nor fraudulently forecasted the last moments of life for the cure of his soul; nor resolved before-hand, to hazard all his hopes upon one desperate cast at the hour of death; neither had he any knowledge of religion or of Christ, before that time: For had he had any, it is probable he would have been amongst the first of the apostles who was first in the kingdom of Heaven.”

Thus St. *Austin*; and we may gather freely from his words, what his thoughts were of death-bed penitents, since he will not allow them to be upon equal footing with one, whose life had been notoriously scandalous, and whose conversion was undoubtedly the effect of an extraordinary grace. But let that be as it will, it is certain, that an extraordinary event is no precedent in any case whatsoever. For who would, for example, be so mad as to throw himself into the sea, because some few have in the late danger been preserved from drowning? or leap into the fire, because some have escaped without being burnt? As, therefore, these extraordinary deliverances are no encouragement to any one to venture his life, upon the bare hopes of such a preservation, so neither ought the example of the penitent thief, embolden any one to hazard the eternal life of his soul, upon the hopes that an extraordinary grace will come in to his assistance in the last extremity.

Let us, therefore, all resolve to put in practice this excellent advice of the pious *Thomas-a-Kempis*: *Do now, my dearest brother, do now whatever thou art able to do.* Now, whilst thou art in perfect health; now, whilst the sun of grace and mercy shines yet bright upon thee, *for the night cometh when no man can work*, John ix. 4. It is well, if in our last sickness we shall be able to maintain the ground we got whilst we were in health. It is well if we can then support ourselves under all the trials incident to that condition, by the stock of virtue we have laid up before-hand. But let us never flatter ourselves with vain and groundless hopes of doing great matters, at a time when we are not only of ourselves the most unfit for it, but the Devil is most active to put all manner of obstacles in

our way : for he knows we are then at our last cast, upon which our eternal happiness depends, and will therefore employ his utmost skill and malice to procure our ruin.

Say not that repentance never comes too late ; for though it be beyond all question, that a true repentance is never too late ; yet a late repentance, as St. *Austin* tells us, is seldom a true one. Because it is much to be suspected, that mere fervile fear, or self-love, has a greater share in the motive of it than the love of God. It is to be feared, that such a repentance is like the trouble and remorse of a malefactor led to execution, who is sorry for having followed a course of life, which has brought him to an untimely and shameful end.

I heartily wish it may prove otherwise, to those who will have the misfortune to put it to the trial : and though, in reference to any particular person, charity obliges us to hope favourably, yet I cannot hinder my fears from prevailing, when there appears nothing but a mere death-bed repentance to ground my hope upon. But when a sinner repents, being yet in perfect health, and applies himself seriously to the methods proper for his cure ; when it is evident, he resolves to quit sin, before the power of sinning is just ready to leave him : Oh ! such a repentance has a favourable aspect, and yields a solid ground to build our hopes upon. Such a repentance will be a comfort to us at the hour of death ; as being the most assured pledge we can have, that our heavenly Father regards us with an eye of mercy, and has a blessing in store for us.

THE SIXTH ENTERTAINMENT.

THE DECEITFULNESS OF A DEATH-BED
REPENTANCE.

*God is not mocked, what a man soweth that also
shall he reap. Gal. vi. 6.*

IN my last discourse, I represented at large the difficulties that attend a death-bed conversion. But since the seeming piety and devotion of some death-bed penitents, who after a wicked life have in appearance died the *death of the just*, has given a kind of credit and reputation to the most dangerous cheat the Devil can invent to ruin souls, it will not be amiss to say something concerning those fair outward appearances of repentance, which many well-meaning persons, out of an abundance of mistaken charity, are apt to judge too favourably of, and miscall *dying very happily*. They see a poor sick man, confessing and bewailing his sins, imploring God's mercy, and receiving the last sacraments, with the same sensible marks of a truly contrite and humble heart, as the most fervorous Christian could do; and conclude immediately he has made a happy end. Perhaps he has: nay, it is beyond all question, if his repentance was hearty and sincere. But all is not gold that glitters; and there is a large difference between the appearance and reality, the ceremony and substance, of repentance.

It is true, we are allowed to have favourable thoughts even of the most profligate sinners, as long as there is any reasonable encouragement to ground our hopes upon. But charity has its bounds, and is to be governed by prudence as well as other virtues. A mere death-bed conversion,

version, though attended with circumstances the most favourable in appearance, ought always to be suspected, nay, marked as a dangerous rock, to be avoided by all who have a serious concern to secure their soul's salvation. And, though it may be allowed to afford some degree of hope in favour of the party concerned, it never ought to be magnified into an encouragement for sinners, to hazard their eternal interest upon so weak a bottom. My present design then is to lay before you the uncertainty and deceitfulness of those outward marks of devotion, and repentance, which are apt to mislead men into an over-favourable opinion of a death-bed conversion; and this shall be the subject of this entertainment.

I told you, in my last discourse, that a solid conversion requires a true change of the heart, according to the word of God, *Be converted to me in your whole heart*. Now the heart is said to be changed, when it changes its principal love. As for instance, when the love of God becomes predominant, instead of the love of the world and its sinful pleasures, that heart is truly changed, because its prevailing love is not the same as it was before.

Hence it follows, *first*, That the heart alone is the seat of repentance, because it is the seat of love; and, *secondly*, That sighs and tears, confessions of sins, acts of contrition formed by word of mouth, and verbal protestations and purposes of amendment, are but the *surface* and *outside* of repentance, and not the *substance* of it: Because all these are consistent with a heart wholly unchanged, and may have nothing but mere *self-love*, *servile fear*, or motives *purely human*, for their foundation; though, when the heart is truly changed, they are the usual marks and effects of it.

But, because examples are often more convincing, and make a deeper impression, than the most solid reasons, let the case of King *Antiochus*, as it is represented in the second book of *Maccabees*, serve for an instance of this truth. The exorbitant pride and avarice of this prince, had pushed him on to commit all manner of injustice and barbarities upon the *Jews*: But the divine vengeance overtook him at last, as he was marching in all haste towards *Jerusalem*, with a full intent to lay the city in ashes, and massacre all its inhabitants. For, whilst he was thus breathing nothing but fire and desolation, he was suddenly seized with a violent pain in his bowels, which tortured him beyond expression; and soon after he received a mortal bruise with a fall from his chariot, which soon reduced him to the last extremity.

And here his eyes were opened, and becoming sensible that the wrath of God was kindled against him for his enormous crimes, and particularly the outrages and inhumanities he had committed in *Jerusalem*, he gave such marks of a sincere repentance, that had not the word of God itself informed us of the truth, we might have canonized him for an illustrious penitent. For, in the first place, he acknowledged the hand of God in the punishment inflicted on him. 2. He owned the justice of it. 3. He expressed an entire submission to it. 4. He implored the divine mercy with bitter tears; and in order to obtain it, he promised to atone for his past crimes in such an exemplary manner, as suffices to strike the reader with astonishment. Yet, notwithstanding all his pompous shew, and glittering outside of repentance, God, who is the searcher of all hearts, saw no real change in his. For had his heart been truly changed, and converted

ed to God, there is no doubt but he would have found the mercy he prayed for; whereas, the word of God pronounces upon him in this terrible manner: *This wicked man prayed God, of whom he was not to obtain mercy.*

Here is a frightful example of a death-bed repentance; but the chief use I intend it for, is to convince you, that we never ought to reckon with any positive assurance, even upon the fairest outward appearances of a conversion, unless there be some other reasons to judge by, that they are the effects of a solid change within: Because all outward appearances are ambiguous and uncertain, and may be either unsound or sincere, according as the principle or motive from whence they proceed. A robber, for example, that is fallen into the hands of justice, may be sorry for the robberies he has committed, because he sees himself upon the point of suffering an ignominious death. A libertine may be very much troubled for the life he has led, because he finds himself ruined by it, both as to health and estate. So a woman, convicted of dishonesty, may be very sensibly afflicted, because she has rendered herself infamous by it. Now, all these are *penitents* indeed, but they are not *gospel-penitents*; because their sorrow is grounded upon no better motive than interest or self-love; and a *Heathen*, who has never heard of the Christian religion, will repent upon the same score.

In like manner therefore a sinner, who sees himself at death's door, and upon the brink of everlasting perdition, may, with the fright of so dreadful a prospect, be easily scared into a violent disturbance and anguish of mind, which will outwardly produce the very same effects as the most perfect contrition. Because a violent

fear of any evil near at hand, cannot but affect the party concerned with a great regret, for having, through his folly, drawn it upon himself. And this inward regret, from whatever cause it proceeds, will naturally force sighs, and tears, and lamentations from him, and make him readily lay hold of the obvious expedients to prevent the horrible mischief that threatens him. For what wonder is it, that a person just ready to sink should lay hold of any broken plank to save himself.

But all this fair outside of repentance avails but little, when there is nothing but *servile fear* at the bottom of it. For *servile fear* alone, though useful in the beginning, can never work a thorough change in a sinner's heart, nor by consequence dispose him compleatly for his reconciliation with God. There must be a change of love to qualify him for that blessing, as is generally taught by spiritual writers, and none more clearly than St. *Austin*, who inculcates it on all occasions, and has laid it down as a fundamental maxim of Christian morality, *that love alone makes the difference between the children of God, and the children of the Devil*. The meaning whereof is, that as the love of sin prevailing in the heart makes us children of the Devil, so the love of justice reigning in the soul constitutes us children of God. For which reason, St. *John* has also positively declared, that *whoever loves not, remains in death*; and our Saviour being asked, *What is the first commandment in the law?* answered, *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, &c.*

Hence it follows, *first*, That then alone a sinner's heart can be said to be truly changed or converted, when it passes from the love of the one to the love of the other; that is, when the
love

love of sin is banished, and the love of God enters into its place. For these two loves, being diametrically opposite to one another, in their very natures, cannot subsist together, but must of course destroy each other.

It follows, *secondly*, That mere *servile fear* is of itself insufficient to destroy the love of sin; because it implies no hatred of it for its own sake, and as it is an offence to God, but merely in regard to the punishment that attends it: Which made St. *Austin* say, that whoever leaves off sinning for the fear of Hell-fire, *is not afraid to sin, but to burn*. Now this was properly the case of *Antiochus*, who was sorry for his past sins, not because God was offended by them, but because he found himself smart severely for them; and therefore, was not worthy to obtain the mercy he prayed for, though he shewed all the outward marks of a sincere repentance. I heartily wish it may not be the case of many death-bed penitents. For, though every repenting sinner, whatever his condition be, is under some degree of uncertainty, as to the principle or motive he acts upon, yet, doubtless, there is much better and solid ground to hope favourably of the repentance of one in perfect health, than of him who has deferred it to the last extremity. For of the former we may confidently pronounce; there appears no positive reason to doubt but his conversion is solid and sincere; whereas of the latter we can only say, it is possible it may be so. And the reason of this difference is,

First, Because he that repents in time of perfect health, renounces sin when he has it in his power to continue in it, and thereby shews that it is a free and voluntary act, and not a forced thing to which he is driven by mere stress of fear. Whereas we may reasonably suspect, that
one

one who has held on sinning as long as he could, and only discovers a willingness to leave it, when he can sin no longer, renounces it, as I may say, not for want of *will*, but *power*.

Secondly, He that resolves upon a change of life, whilst he is in perfect health, and has yet time before him to do penance for his sins, shews a real and sincere disposition to it; but he that drives it off to the very last, and only expresses a desire to do penance, when the time of doing it is just expiring, gives reason enough to suspect, that were his life to be continued to him, doing penance for his sins would be the least part of his business in it.

Thirdly, A penitent in time of perfect health has this great advantage, that though his repentance may, as it usually happens, be influenced at first by mere *servile fear*, he has leisure and opportunity to pass forward, and work his soul into a better disposition, by duly applying himself to the exercises proper to introduce the love of God, and softens his heart into a filial compunction. And since God's grace is never wanting to those who are not wanting to themselves, nor denies his assistance where the natural means provided by him are duly employed, a penitent, that has laid hold of the time and opportunity granted him by God, to put these means in practice to the best of his power, has all the reason in the world to hope, that the work of his conversion, though at first perhaps begun by fear, is at last perfected by love, and built upon a solid foundation.

But the case of a death-bed penitent is quite otherwise, as appears evidently from what I told you in my last discourse: for since his circumstances are such, as render the use of the fore-mentioned holy exercises almost utterly impracticable

licable to him, it is very difficult to conceive by what means (without an extraordinary grace) the love of God should get entrance into his heart, especially if we consider to what degree it must needs be hardened against it by long habits of sin; for there are two things naturally requisite to make a rational creature change his natural love; *first*, A sufficient motive to induce him to it; and, *secondly*, A due application of that motive. For let a motive be ever so powerful in itself, unless it be duly applied, it can never affect the heart, as every one may find by experience.

Now give me leave to ask, what motive a sinner can have to love God in his last sickness, more than he had all the time he was in health? I am sensible indeed, that all the motives of *fear* are then far more pressing upon him, than at any other time: For whether he reflects upon what is past, or considers what is to come, both the one and the other present objects only proper to strike him with terror. If he considers his life past, he sees nothing but what looks ominous upon him, and threatens him with everlasting punishment. If he looks before him, he sees himself upon the brink of eternity, and an offended judge ready to mount the tribunal to pronounce his doom. Now all these objects are very proper indeed, to create or increase fear, but not to inspire love.

You will say, perhaps, the consideration of God's infinite goodness, his boundless mercies, the many particular favours already received, and the like, are very strong and powerful motives to love: I own they are so; but why then do not all men love God with their whole heart, since all have these motives to love him? The reason is, because the very strongest motives must

must be duly applied to work their desired effect, and this can only be done by an attentive and reiterated consideration of them: For how powerful soever the fore-mentioned motives are to enkindle the love of God, it is not, alas! a few distracted thoughts, or passing glances upon them, will immediately inflame the heart! they must be leisurely ruminated upon, and thoroughly digested, that so they may be made to sink deeply into the mind, and then by a gradual progress make their way to the heart: Because, unless the ideas of truth be first well imprinted on the intellect, the heart and will can never be affected with them.

Now all this, humanly speaking, requires not only time, but all the strength, composure, and presence of thought a person is capable of, even in the best state of health: which being, doubtless, much more than can be naturally expected from one disabled with sickness of body, oppressed with pains, and disturbed with excessive fears, we may justly apprehend a death-bed penitent makes for the most part but a very lame business of it, and seldom passes beyond mere *servile fear*; so that, however sincere his repentance may appear outwardly, yet if the root be defective, it is not that *worthy fruit of penance* the gospel requires, but rather like that fruit, which grows near the *dead sea*, fair to the eye, but unsound at heart.

And here I cannot but very much blame the indiscreet charity of those, who are ever ready to pronounce with as much assurance in favour of the death-bed penitents, as if there were no ground for any doubt of their salvation. *Oh!* (cries one) *with what extraordinary devotion did such a one receive the last sacraments! He was a great libertine indeed, but I doubt not but he has made*

made a very happy end. Now, is there not here as good encouragement as can be given to sinners, to hazard all upon a death-bed repentance? Could the Devil himself speak more effectually to serve his own purpose? for is not this the obvious consequence to be drawn from it? *You see here is one that has indulged himself in all unlawful pleasures to the very last, yet after all he made a very good end, and died very happily: And why then should we deny ourselves any thing, or undergo the hardship of doing penance for our sins, when Heaven may be purchased upon much easier terms?* These doubtless are the most obvious and natural inferences men are apt to draw from the fore-mentioned elogiums of death-bed conversions.

I am sure at least the Fathers speak another language, and are far from encouraging us to judge too much on the favourable side in the case of death-bed penitents. I shall omit St. *Chrysostom's* words, which are very terrible indeed, and only quote St. *Austin*; "If a sinner (says he) in his last sickness desires to be admitted to penance, and is immediately reconciled and dies; I own indeed we deny him not what he asks, neither do we presume he dies well. If he himself be secure, I am not. For though we administer penance to him, we can give him no security. It is true, I pronounce not that he will be damned; neither do I say that he will be saved. Wilt thou therefore be delivered from all doubt, lay hold of what is certain, and depend not on what is uncertain. Do penance whilst thou art in health. If thou dost so, I tell thee thou art secure, because thou hast done penance, whilst thou hadst it in thy power to sin. But if thou wilt do penance, when

when thou canst sin no longer, thou leavest not off sinning, but thy sins leave thee."

These are St. *Austin's* words; and they suffice to convince us, on the one hand, how far this holy father was from being of the pretended charitable disposition of those, who are so ready to magnify death-bed conversions; and to let us know, on the other, how mean an opinion himself had of them. Truly we ought rather to speak with fear and trembling of those, who have been so unhappy as to run the risque of so dangerous an after-game, than by indiscreet eulogiums to give a kind of reputation to the cheat, and help to inveigle others into the snare.

But as we ought to be very wary and reserved in this point, so we cannot speak with too much assurance of the happy circumstances of those who have quitted their sins, and done penance in time of health, whatever their lives may have been before. And I heartily wish all may embrace this course, which alone is safe after a sinful life. For Heaven has but two gates, *innocence* and *penance*; the former is, I fear, already shut against most of us. All then we have to do is, to secure the latter as soon as we can; lest, if we drive it off too long, we may come to prosper no better than the *five foolish virgins*, who beginning to trim their lamps, when the bridegroom's door was shut, came too late for admittance, and were repulsed with this answer, *I know ye not*. And therefore our blessed Saviour concludes the parable with this admonition, *Be therefore watchful, for ye know not the day nor hour*.

It is certain no man can tell how soon he may be called upon. He that is now in perfect health, may be seized with a mortal distemper before the end of this month or week. This will

will certainly happen to many in the world ; and we have no security but it may happen to any of us. So that the only assured means to prevent our being reduced to the necessity of a death-bed repentance is, to let no time of health slip from us, but lay immediately hold of it, and improve it to our best advantage. And what comfort will it be to us, in our last sickness, to be interiorly convinced, that to the best of our knowledge nothing has been wanting on our side for the making of our peace with God, and that the great business for which we came into this world, is then ready done to our hands, and wants nothing but the finishing stroke to be given to it.

Oh ! what a strengthening cordial will this be against the usual terrors of death ! With what joy shall we then look back upon the good works we have done, the virtues we have practised, the victories we have gained over our passions, and the voluntary mortifications we have undergone in punishment of our sins ! But, on the other hand, what fear and anguish, what trouble, darkness and perplexity of thoughts, will those be seized with, who in their last extremity see themselves void of all solid virtue, oppressed with a heavy load of sins, unprovided for eternity, and under a pressing necessity to undertake a work of the greatest importance imaginable, when dispirited with weakness, pains, and fears, and streightened for time, they neither have the heart to set about it, nor are in any tolerable condition to go thorough with it ! If we could but see what passes in the soul of a wretch in this unhappy condition, it would certainly terrify us from ever hazarding to fall into it ; and the sight of a criminal upon the rack would be a spectacle of less horror to us.

THE

THE SEVENTH ENTERTAINMENT.
OF JUDGMENT.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE CAUSE TO BE TRIED
AT THE GREAT TRIBUNAL.

*We must all appear before the judgment-seat of
Christ. 2 Cor. v. 10.*

OF all the truths of the Christian religion, none is more terrifying than that which is laid before us in these words of St. Paul. Holy Job could never think of it without trembling, *What shall I do, says he, when the Lord shall come to judge, or when he shall demand an account of me, what shall I answer for myself?* St. Jerome was no less sensibly affected with it, as himself relates; nor could he ever think of it, but he found himself seized with terror, and the impression sunk so deep that no business could remove it from his thoughts; for whatever he was doing, he imagined he heard the last trumpet sounding in his ears, *Rise, ye dead, and come to judgment.* Many other saints have lived under the same continual apprehensions of it; particularly St. Arsenius, who, in his last sickness, declared to those that were about him, that since his retirement into the desert, he had not passed one day without fear.

And truly it is no wonder that men, who gave themselves leisure to think, and looked farther than the present world, should be terrified with the prospect of a day which was to decide their eternal lot: a day, attended with all the circumstances proper to strike terror into any heart, that will but consider them with due attention: For the saints were not content to allow them a general view, or passing glance; but, in order to imprint the ideas of them deeply on their minds,

minds, they ruminated distinctly and leisurely upon every circumstance relating to it. They considered the infinite *holiness, wisdom, power,* and *majesty* of the judge, before whom they were to appear. They considered the exactness of the scrutiny to be made of every thought, word, and action of their whole lives; the large difference between God's judgments, and those of men, the *weighty importance of the cause*, which when once decided would admit of no appeal; and, finally, the *severity and rigour of the law*, by which it was to be tried.

By these considerations often repeated, and thoroughly digested, they kept themselves in the disposition prescribed by St. Paul, of *working their salvation in fear and trembling*. And if all Christians would but follow their method in this point, the face of Christendom would soon be changed, and men would not let loose the reins to all sinful liberties, as if no account were to be given hereafter. This certainly would be the fruit of a frequent and serious consideration of the severe judgment which every man must undergo immediately after his death. Since therefore I have now already gone through all the principal considerations relating to *death*, the order of my subject now calls upon me to speak of this *judgment*; which containing several truths of great concern, I will now begin with the weighty importance of the cause that is to be decided in it, which shall be the whole subject of this entertainment.

When a criminal under confinement expects to be tried for his life, if his case admits of any hope, he fails not to use all endeavours possible to prepare himself for that sentence of death may not be pronounced upon him: He makes all the interest he can, consults the ablest lawyers,
studies

studies all his answers to the indictment that will be brought against him, and, in a word, spares no pains or cost to make a good defence.

Now if any one should ask a person under these circumstances, what reason he has to be thus concerned? why he gives himself so much trouble? or to what purpose he throws away so much money? why he will not rather set his heart at rest, and study to divert himself? If any one, I say, should put these questions to him, his answer would doubtless be, that he has reason enough to be concerned, and not to sit idle, when his life is at stake. And without all dispute the answer would be too rational and satisfactory to leave room for any further reply.

Yet, after all, what is this precious treasure called *life*, on which men set so high a value, and seek to preserve at any rate? Holy *Job* gives this account of it: *Man born of a woman lives a short time, and is filled with many miseries. He comes forth as a flower, and is bruised into dust. He flies away as a shadow, and never remains in the same state.* And St. *James*, to express the shortness of it, calls it *a vapour that appears for a little time, and then vanishes away.*

This is the valuable treasure we are so fond of, and which nature has so strong an inclination to preserve, and fear to lose, that no business relating to this world is of equal moment with that wherein life is concerned. And hence it is that the case of a poor criminal expecting to be brought to his trial, to receive his final doom, is by all esteemed a concern of so high a nature, that nothing can be done too much to prevent a miscarriage; and the terror of it affects not only the party concerned, I mean the criminal himself, but all that have any tie, whether of blood or friendship with him, are interested,

interested, and solicitous for his deliverance from the danger that threatens him.

Now, if a cause of life and death in this world, be justly esteemed a business of so great a concern, though all that can be lost upon the issue of it be no more than a short and miserable life; who can find words to express, or ideas to conceive, the weighty importance of a cause, wherein the soul's eternal and unchangeable doom is to be determined? For the thing that is at stake in this trial, is not, alas! the small remainder of a few months or years, the poor comfort of a perishable life, or the uncertain enjoyment of a temporal estate, but the interest and final sentence of eternity. *Heaven* and *Hell* are the reward and punishment disputed in it; that is, life and death without end, joys and torments without measure. In a word, all that can be hoped for on the one hand, and all that can be feared on the other, depends upon the happy or unhappy issue of it. Oh! what a weighty concern is this! How inconsiderable and trivial are all things of this world, if put in balance with it.

To give you a clear idea of this truth, I need but compare the *goods* and *evils* of this life with the *joys* and *torments* of the life to come, and shew the infinite disproportion there is between them. For in this life every thing is *mixed*; the enjoyments as well as sufferings of this world have their allays, and nothing is good or bad in extreme.

First, Its joys are evidently of this nature, since we find that even those, who are esteemed most happy, are seldom or ever content. When they have no real evils to trouble them, imaginary ones are called in to supply the place. Something is ever wanting, if not to reasonable desires,

desires, at least to satisfy extravagance or humour. They grow weary of what they have, and are uneasy for what they have not. Those goods, from which men measure their very worldly happiness, want not their evils; their wealth is encumbered with solitudes and fears; their *honours* expose them to envy and censure; and their *pleasures* are either too short or too long, and so cause either disappointment or loathing. But let them be ever so artfully contrived to prevent both the one and the other, the very thought that they must all end in death, destroys a part of their satisfaction, and suffices alone to cast a damp upon their most refined and heightened joys.

This is the general condition of the *goods* of this life, and its *evils* are of the same *mixed* nature, and have all their peculiar abatements. For if *pain* be the evil men are afflicted with, it is either moderate or violent; if moderate it is tolerable, and there is no great reason to complain. If violent, it cannot last long. Besides, a good conscience, and the hopes of an eternal repose, sweetens the one as well as the other, and is, as a continual feast. So that whilst the body is in pain, the mind may be at ease, and then the comfort is greater than the affliction.

But if *disgrace* be the evil that troubles them, they either deserve it or not. If not, they suffer innocently, the consciousness whereof is a most solid comfort. But if they have brought it upon themselves by any crime, or culpable indiscretion, they may draw a substantial good from the evil they suffer, by submitting humbly to it; and so make their disgrace with men become a step to raise them in the favour and esteem of God.

Lastly, if *poverty* be their cross, they have at least the advantage of being free from the snares and
and

and temptations of riches; and the advantage is very considerable, if rightly valued. Besides, if their circumstances be narrow, it is but contracting their desires within the same bounds; and a reasonable content may be found in any state. It is true, they have not the pleasures and conveniencies which the rich enjoy, but they are also without the dangers to which their enjoyments expose them: They are likewise without the uneasiness of mind, which all conscientious rich men must needs be under, in regard of the account they must give of their stewardship to God. For they are but in effect his stewards, and will be responsible to him for all abuses committed in their stewardship. Add to this, that the poor are but, by God's appointment, in the very same condition which many thousands have made their voluntary choice, nay, was chosen by Christ himself, and pronounced by him a *blessed state*. And is not this a solid comfort? But though all other comforts should be wanting, the consideration that death will infallibly put an end to all their sufferings in this world, is one at least that can never fail.

Thus then we see that neither the *goods* or *evils* of this life are without mixtures; its sweetest joys are sprinkled with bitterness, and its bitterest sorrows have an alloy of comfort either in present or reversion. But in the world to come matters are not so. Every thing there is pure and unmixed. All sorrow is banished from Heaven, and in Hell there is no comfort. So that the future state of the soul being once fixed admits of no mean; but is either infinitely miserable, or infinitely happy. Because God being an infinite good, the possession of him cannot but be an infinite blessing, and the loss of him an infinite evil. And hence there is no *disscontent* in

in Heaven, because the blessed souls enjoy whatever they can wish or desire : No *disappointment*, because all their hopes are fully satisfied : No *weariness* or *loathing*, because the object that renders them happy, always is, and always appears the same. Finally, no *fear*, because they know their state to be permanent and everlasting ; they possess inestimable *riches*, without solicitude or trouble ; they are crowned with *honour* and *glory*, without jealousy or envy ; and are incessantly filled with incomprehensible *delights* and *pleasures*, without satiety.

But as the heavenly beatitude is a state made up of all goods every way perfect and complete, so *damnation*, which is the state diametrically opposite to it, is a most frightful aggregation of all imaginable evils, without any mixture of good. For in Hell the soul is deprived of every thing she loves or desires, and condemned to every thing she abhors or fears. She has a violent inclination in her nature to be happy, and she knows herself eternally separated from every thing that is capable of contributing to it. She craves after wealth and plenty, and she sees herself stripped naked of every thing, and sunk into the lowest degree of misery and want. She loves honour and esteem, and she is condemned to everlasting confusion and disgrace. In a word, happiness and content, ease and pleasures are the things she most earnestly thirsts after, and she is doomed to torments, without any glimpse or shadow of comfort : 'Torments never to be intermitted, never to be abated, never to end.

Now, from this terrible difference between the condition of things temporal and eternal, and the infinite greatness both of the rewards and punishments of the other world, we may form some idea of the weighty importance of the
cause

cause that is to be decided at the great tribunal. For it follows clearly from them, that the importance of it surpasses all concerns even of the highest nature in this world, as much as Heaven is above earth, as much as eternity exceeds a short term of time, or the infinite being of God surpasses all limited and created beings. And therefore since these have no manner of proportion, it is plain that all earthly concerns, even those that are attended with the most weighty consequences, are no more than childish toys and trifles, in comparison with the great business that is to be decided hereafter. For whereas all the business of this life is about things that are neither permanent nor solid in their nature, as I have shewn, we may truly say they are scarce worth our being solicitous about them. But the goods and evils of the other world being infinite and everlasting, the consequence of our succeeding or miscarrying in a cause, which is to give the final determination to our future state, comprehends all whatever a rational and immortal soul can either love or hate, hope or fear, wish or abhor.

And therefore at whatever moment our souls are summoned to appear before the tribunal of Christ, it will then be irrevocably determined, whether we are to be the happiest or most unfortunate creatures that God can make us: Whether Heaven, with all its infinite joys, or Hell, with all its unconceivable torments, whether delights pure and unmixed, or evils without any shadow of comfort, are to be our everlasting portion. If we be found free from guilt, life without end, joys without sorrow, fullness without satiety, incorruptible riches, immortal honours, and a crown of glory that will never fade, will be our reward. But if we be

found guilty of any mortal sin deliberately committed, and not washed off by true repentance, alas ! poor wretches, we are then immediately sentenced to be for ever banished from the sight of God, doomed to unquenchable flames, and condemned to all that is dreadful without any hopes of ever enjoying one moment of ease, relief, intermission, or abatement of our pains. O dreadful judgment, on which the soul's eternal and unchangeable lot depends ! Dreadful judgment, after which (allowing only for the temporal punishment of pious souls not fully purified) there is no mean to be found, but every thing is infinite, incomprehensible, eternal.

For this reason our Saviour exhorts us, *not to fear those who can kill the body, but only him who, when the body is destroyed, can cast the soul into Hell-fire.* For this reason he tells us, *that it profits a man nothing to gain the whole world, if he loses his soul.* Finally, for this reason he commands us to sacrifice an eye, hand, or foot, or whatever is dearest or most precious to us in this life, rather than be hereafter condemned to everlasting flames. And it was undoubtedly the consideration of these terrifying truths which made St. *Austin* pray to God to be burned, tortured, or cut to pieces here, so he might but be spared hereafter. It was this made the holy martyrs prefer burning gridirons, gibbets, rods, and axes, before the pleasures of this life. And the same motive induced so many holy men and women to renounce all satisfactions of nature, and fly to caves and desarts, to shelter themselves against the terrors and irreparable misfortunes of the day of wrath.

And truly, what wonder is it they should renounce trifles, to secure eternal and substantial good ? Or that they should choose to undergo
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some temporal pains and inconveniencies, rather than expose themselves to eternal miseries and torments? For this is no more than acting according to the dictates of reason, which naturally prompts us to give the preference to the greater good, and of two evils to choose the lesser. But what justly challenges our greatest surprize and amazement is, that even those, who would not enjoy one moment's rest, if either life or estate were in danger, should be charmed into a dead sleep, and live on with all the unconcern imaginable, whilst Heaven and eternity are at stake, and in manifest danger of being irreparably lost. This is so monstrous an infatuation, that one would think it were inconsistent either with faith or reason; and yet how many Christians are guilty of it? How many are there that live as if there either were no day of reckoning to come, or the interest depending on it were beneath their concern?

Preserve us, O God, from this fatal blindness. Pierce our hearts with the terrors of thy judgments, and give us so deep a sense of the weighty importance of securing our eternal happiness, that nothing may ever divert us from it.

THE EIGHTH ENTERTAINMENT.

THE RIGOUR OF THE LAW BY WHICH WE
ARE TO BE JUDGED.

The word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day. John xii. 48.

THESE words of *Christ* mark out clearly to us the law by which we are to be judged; to wit, the *evangelical law* contained in the four gospels, and other tracts of the New Testament.

It therefore concerns us all to be in some measure informed of the nature of this law : For our *all* depends upon it : our eternal lot will be decided by it, and if it finds us guilty, we are all lost for ever. My present design then is to explain to you this important circumstance both of the *first* and *last judgment*, viz. the rigour of the law by which we are to be judged. And this shall be the whole subject of this entertainment.

It is related in the tenth chapter of St. *Luke*, that our Saviour, being consulted by a *Jewish* doctor concerning the means necessary to salvation, instead of satisfying him with a direct answer, referred him to the law. *In lege quid scriptum est ? quomodo legis ? What is written in the law ? How dost thou read ?* giving him thereby to understand, that to save his soul, he only needed to consult the law of God, and do according as it should direct him.

Now as the laws of civil governments serve to a double purpose, viz. to direct and punish ; to regulate the duties of civil life, and convict the offenders against them ; so is it in the spiritual kingdom of Christ. God has made us an ample provision of laws, some of which are set down in the moral tracts of the Old Testament, and summed up in the two tables of the decalogue. But these being not only reinforced but explained by *Christ*, we may truly say that the gospels, which deliver his sacred doctrine in his own words, and the other parts of the New Testament, which are but comments upon them, contain the whole body of the *Christian law* ; that is, of all the *precepts*, *rules*, and *maxims*, upon which a Christian is bound to model his life.

Whence

Whence it follows, that as a Christian is bound to live according to the direction of this law, so will he be hereafter judged, and either saved or condemned by it. The gospel is his guide, and he must follow it, if he will attain to life everlasting. The gospel is his rule, and if he swerves from it, he must expect to undergo the severity of it. In a word, the gospel is the law he professes, and he must stand or fall by it at the day of judgment. So that this question, *What is written in the law? How dost thou read?* proposed by Christ to the Jewish doctor, will then be pressed home to every Christian. All our thoughts, words, and deeds will be brought to this test, and every article of the indictment against us examined by it. Whatever is found conformable to this law, will be approved and rewarded; and whatever appears contrary to it, will be condemned and punished. In fine, this sentence of our Saviour to the Jews, *The word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day*, will be fully made good in relation to every one of us. And happy he, who now lives so up to it, as to be hereafter able to stand the trial of it.

It being therefore certain that the gospel is the law which is to judge us, let us now enquire into the nature of it, and see whether it will, in any likelihood, prove favourable to our cause, or whether it will not rather increase the terror of the last day. Let any one but apply himself to an attentive consideration of the holy doctrine it contains, and if he be not wholly insensible, he will find himself seized with fear, when he reflects, that at the opening of the books of conscience, all the particulars of his life entered into those sacred registers will be compared with it, and his eternal doom determined by it. For

I observe three things in it very terrifying and full of rigour. *First*, We shall be accountable to it for the *secrets* of our *hearts*, as well as *outward works*. *Secondly*, it will have no regard to the *corrupt customs* and maxims of this world. And, *thirdly*, the duties, of which it will require an account, are mostly such as our corrupt nature has the greatest repugnance to. From these three heads we may easily gather, how little favourable this law is like to prove to the important cause that is to be decided by it. I shall make a few remarks upon each.

First then, we shall stand accountable to it for the *secrets* of our *hearts*, as well as *outward works*. And whereas human laws restrain only the *hand* and *tongue*, but are forced to leave men the freedom of their thoughts, the gospel law will, on the contrary, take as strict a cognizance of what we have *thought*, as of what we have said or done. Our *desires* will be as nicely looked into as our deeds. Our very *intentions* will be weighed in the balance of the sanctuary, and the motives upon which we have acted, as severely examined as the actions themselves. So that what many times is found in substance, and seemingly above all exception, will, in this court of judicature, be found vitiated in its principle or root: Here all the subtle insinuations of *pride*, and secret contrivances of *self-love*, will be narrowly searched into and pronounced upon. Here a strict inquiry will be made, of how much has been done merely for interest, how much to gratify some particular humour, or to gain esteem or applause. And whatever shall be found to have been influenced by these or other such human respects, though it was highly valued and admired in this world, will be disapproved and censured by the law that is to judge us.

But

But of all the wicked stratagems of corrupt nature, none will be more severely punished than the *hypocrisy* of those who, under the mask of zeal for religion, have covered the blackest designs of ruining the reputation of their real or reputed enemies, by malicious insinuations, or accusing them of crimes whereof they were wholly innocent. And I shall only add, that whoever finds his conscience charged with any part of this unchristian practice, though his intention was never so seemingly pious (for a good intention can never justify a bad deed) cannot hope for mercy at the day of judgment, without first making a reparation answerable to the injustice he has committed.

Secondly, This law will have no regard to the usual plea of this world from *custom* or *example*; I mean in favour of such practices as interfere with or encroach upon any branch of the doctrine of the gospel. For truly if custom should hereafter be allowed to put in its plea, and influence the decision of our cause, I shall be obliged to own that many of those, who in all likelihood will make but a very unfortunate business of it, would have as fair a prospect of succeeding as they could wish, and doomsday would not be so frightful by many degrees as it is every where represented. For excepting only enormous crimes, what would not custom apologize for? All modish vices would find shelter under its protection. *Pride, idleness, intemperance, immodesty in dressing, revenge and prodigality*, would not want an advocate to plead their cause; and, in a word, all fashionable extravagancies would have good warrant to secure them.

But, alas! this plea will be out of doors at the great day of assizes. It carries indeed a great sway now, and has a power which few

are able to resist. But it ends with this world nor will its laws be in the least consulted by the supreme arbiter of life and death. So that whoever has nothing but *custom* or *example* to alledge for his justification, will make but a very weak defence.

Hence, in the world to come, it will be to very little purpose to say, *I have done as others did before me. I followed the common practice. I thought it necessary to conform myself to custom.* For though this be a plausible cover now, and carries a fair shew of reason for any thing that is not grossly scandalous, it will not satisfy hereafter; and the general answer to all these specious pretences will be; *What is writ in the law? How dost thou read?* that is, *have thy actions been conformable to the gospel?* This, I say, will be the general answer to all the pretended reasons for custom and compliance, wherewith corrupt nature seeks now to put a gloss upon the works of self-love and pride. For when God comes to judge, this varnish will be taken off, and every thing be made to appear in its proper colours. The *evangelical law* will then have its full course, in spite of all the contrary customs of the world; and nothing will find approbation, but what can stand the trial of it.

Nay, *custom*, the great law-maker of this world, will be so far from helping us out at the day of judgment, that our having conformed to it, in contradiction to the gospel, will be a considerable article against us; as is evident both from the many *woes* pronounced by *Christ* against the *world*, and the repeated prohibitions recorded in holy writ against conforming to it. *Be not conformed to this world*, says *St. Paul*, and *whoever*, says *St. James*, *will be a friend of this world, becomes an enemy of God.*

Oh!

Oh ! now many worldly Christians, who have nothing but custom to plead for them, will be condemned by this very maxim of the evangelical law ! How will they stand confounded, when they find all their fine reasons of pretended decency and compliance rejected as frivolous, and no other plea admitted, but what is grounded upon the conformity of their actions to the law they swore to at the font ! And yet this will certainly be the unhappy case of all such lovers and admirers of the world, as had more regard to its approbation and esteem, than to the law of God demanded of them.

Thirdly, The duties of which it will demand an account, are mostly such as corrupt nature has the greatest repugnance to. This will appear beyond all dispute, if we but reflect, that it will hereafter demand an account of what it now *commands* and *forbids* ; and pronounce upon us according as we have been exact or deficient in performing the one and avoiding the other. Now, whoever will but seriously apply himself to read and study the evangelical law with an unbiassed judgment, and sincere desire to discover the true spirit and meaning of it, will find that the greatest part of its precepts and maxims either oblige us to things from which our nature is very averse, or prohibits things to which it is most strongly inclined. For what is it our nature chiefly *loves* or *hates* ? It loves *honour* and *esteem*, *wealth* and *pomp*, *ease*, *liberty*, and *pleasures* ; and, by consequence, it regards *poverty*, *contempt*, *restraint*, and *suffering*, as its greatest grievances. Now, the gospel not only cries down all the forementioned objects of our inclinations, and preaches up the objects of our aversions, but obliges all its disciples to such du-

ties, as directly thwart nature both in one and the other.

As for instance, what can mortify nature more in its inclination to *honour* and *esteem* than to be bound to imitate the humility of the Cross? To bear the confusion of confessing our most hidden sins? To humble ourselves before God and man? To love and to do good to them that despise, traduce, and affront us? Yet all these duties are required of us by the law that is to judge us.

Secondly, What can thwart our nature more in its love of *wealth* and *pomp*, than to be bound not to set our hearts and affections upon them, and be in readiness to sacrifice all we enjoy in this world, rather than betray our duty, or offend God mortally? Yet this we are obliged to by the law that is to judge us.

Thirdly, What can cross nature more in its love of *liberty* and *ease*, than to be under an obligation of improving the talents we have received? Of being watchful over our senses? Of bridling the tongue, avoiding the occasions of sin, and being faithful in acquitting ourselves of all the duties of our respective stations and callings? Yet we are charged with all these obligations by the law that is to judge us.

Fourthly, and *lastly*, What greater contradiction can there be to our natural propensity to *pleasure*, than *striving to enter through the narrow gate*; *gaining the kingdom of heaven by violence*; *doing worthy fruits of penance*; *hating and denying ourselves*; *mortifying the deeds of the flesh by the spirit*; *crucifying the flesh with all its affections and lusts*; *abstaining from all things to gain the crown*; and, in a word, imitating the serious, laborious, and suffering life of our heavenly pattern *Jesus Christ*? Yet all these duties are in
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a certain degree required of us by the law that is to judge us. So that nothing is plainer, than that this law obliges us to many duties most disrelishing to nature, and directly opposite to its strongest inclinations. And by consequence, as it now requires them of us, so shall we be hereafter accountable to it for the performance.

The holy Fathers were undoubtedly of this opinion: For they used it for the most part as an argument to convince idolators, that the planting of the Christian faith was the work of a divine and supernatural power; and that nothing but the hand of God could ever have carried it on, and brought it to perfection. Now, if the doctrine of the gospel suited with the humour of the world, or were agreeable to flesh and blood, the argument had been wholly frivolous; for what need of the hand of God to bring men over to a religion that flattered their inclinations? What need of a divine and supernatural power to carry on an undertaking, that should meet no opposition in men's nature to hinder its success? But it being supposed that the Christian doctrine runs counter in many things both to the received maxims of the world, and the most pressing inclinations of flesh and blood, the argument was unanswerable; and the holy Fathers using it against the Pagans for that purpose, is an evident proof, that this was their idea of it.

Neither were the fathers alone of this persuasion; but all the saints, whom the church honours as such, and recommends to our imitation, have ever agreed with them in their ideas of the rigour of the gospel; as the method of their lives, which they formed upon it, sufficiently testifies. For was it not their daily and only business to study to deny and mortify themselves?

selves? Consider but the particulars of their lives, and you will find it so; for they renounced whatever nature delights in, and made choice of what it had an aversion to. They spent their days in the most laborious practices of penance. They brought their bodies under subjection, and subdued their rebellious passions by praying, watching, fasting, and other austerities. In a word, they engaged themselves in a continual war against all the pleasures, liberties, and satisfactions of this world.

Now what induced the saints, who wore the same flesh and blood, and were as sensible both of pleasure and pain as the rest of their fellow-mortals; what induced them, I say, to undertake a course of life so opposite to all the inclinations of nature? It was undoubtedly their persuasion, that whatever they did in this kind was but conformable to the law, whereof they professed themselves disciples, and to which they were to be accountable hereafter. For without this persuasion it had certainly been impossible, that men in their senses, and naturally as great lovers of themselves as the rest of mankind, should ever have made so strange a choice as to prefer sufferings and self-denials to the pleasures and conveniencies of life; and therefore we must either charge the saints with folly and delusion, or conclude the evangelical law, from which they took their measures, is far more severe in its precepts and maxims, than the world seems willing to own: Not that it follows hence, that the gospel obliges all Christians to live up to the austerities practised by the saints; but it is above all question, that it obliges them to something that bears a resemblance with it; and that a life, which is a flat contradiction to theirs, and the very reverse of it, neither has the
gospel

gospel for its pattern, nor will hereafter be able to stand the trial of it.

Thus I have laid before you both the weighty importance of the cause that is to be tried before the great tribunal, and the severity of the law by which it is to be tried: I leave you now to judge, whether we can pretend to act rationally, if we make it not our most serious endeavour to secure a point of such infinite importance on the one hand, and liable to so great a hazard on the other; or whether we ought not to be at least as active, careful, and solicitous in managing this concern, as we should be in case something of very great importance relating to this world were at stake.

Let us then suppose we were now fallen into the hands of justice, kept under close confinement, and expecting daily to be tried for our lives; what should we do in this case? What measures would be taken? Would we sit down with our arms across, or entertain ourselves with some frivolous amusement till we were summoned to the bar? Should we not rather look about us in time, and busy ourselves in preparing for our trial, by making friends, by consulting some skillful lawyer, by studying our defence, and answers to the evidence that would appear against us? Especially if we were persuaded, that by taking these precautions we might secure our lives and fortunes, and by neglecting them we should certainly lose both the one and the other.

Now, though the case supposed be but a shadow of the real one, which regards the business of the life to come, yet the measures, we should resolve upon in the one, may be some direction as to what we ought to do in the other. Let us then consider, that we must all
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one day appear before the *Tribunal of Christ*, to receive sentence of eternal life or death. This world is our prison, whence we must one day go forth in order to our trial in the next. We know not how soon we may be called upon. All we are sure of is, that we must come to it sooner or later. However, during our confinement here below, we may order matters so, that the trial, instead of being a day of terror and confusion, may be a day of joy and honour to us. And how must this be done? by only taking proportionably the same measures, as we would in the case supposed.

Let us then do as much to save our souls, as we would to save our lives, and all will go well. Let us not waste our time in idle or sinful amusements, but make it our principal business from henceforward to prepare for our trial, by *making friends*, by advising with some *skilful lawyer*, and *studying our answers* to the accusations we already know will be brought against us.

The principal person, with whom we must endeavour to make an interest, is our *advocate* and *mediator Jesus Christ*. Let us bewail our sins daily before him, with an humble and sincere repentance. Let us now make him our pattern, and he will not fail to be our friend, even when he comes to be our judge.

2dly, We must make an interest with the *saints*, and particularly with the *Blessed Virgin*, by a devout observance of their feasts, by imitating their virtues, and often imploring their intercession. And, 3dly, according to our Saviour's advice, we must *make ourselves friends of the mammon of injustice*: that is, gain the poor over to our side, and purchase their prayers by frequent alms. Let us but see the poor as we would our lawyers, in case we had a considerable

able law-suit depending, and it will go a great way towards the gaining our cause. Their prayers have a great power with our judge, because they are his representatives here upon earth, and what is done to them for Christ his sake will be accepted, as if it had been done to *Christ himself*.

We must also consult from time to time some *skilful lawyer*, I mean, some prudent director, whose advice we may depend upon. But then we must take care to state our case fairly to him. For if we use double-dealing, or conceal any thing of moment from him, though he were an angel, we should perish under his hands.

Lastly, We must prepare our answers to the accusations we already know will be brought against us. Now if we can but make it appear, that we have done *worthy fruits of penance*, this will be an unexceptionable answer to all accusations of what kind soever. Because all *penitent sinners*, that is, all sinners, though ever so enormous, if they do worthy fruits of penance to expiate their sins past, and begin a new course of life, and persevere in it, have God's own infallible promise of mercy delivered in these express terms: *When the wicked man turns away from the wickedness he has committed, and does judgment and justice, he shall certainly live, and he shall not die.*

THE NINTH ENTERTAINMENT.

THE INFINITE KNOWLEDGE OF THE JUDGE.

There is nothing covered that shall not be revealed, nor hid, that shall not be known. Matt. x. 26.

IN the introduction to my first discourse upon judgment, I made a short enumeration of the most **weighty**

weighty circumstances relating to it, and have already enlarged upon two of them, *viz.* the importance of the cause that is to be decided in it, and the rigour of the *law* by which it is to be tried. It remains now to say something concerning the character of the judge before whom we are to appear. You all know the person is *Jesus Christ*, true God and true man; and therefore infinite in all the attributes belonging to the divine nature; as *power, knowledge, goodness, justice* and *mercy*. Now, if I were to consider him in quality of *redeemer* of mankind, or as he is the *advocate* of sinners, his *infinite mercies* would be a proper subject for me to dwell upon: But since I am now to speak of him only as *judge*, you will not be surprised to hear me deliver such truths, as are more apt to cause terror than comfort.

However, it is a certain truth, that the whole course of this life is a time of *mercy*, and the greatest sinners are capable of receiving the benefit of it to the very last gasp: But after that, we enter into another world, where *justice* takes place, and *every one will receive*, as *St. Paul* assures us, *precisely according to his works*: I shall, therefore, consider three things in the Judge before whom we are to appear: 1. His *infinite knowledge*, which nothing can escape: 2. His being the very person, whom we offend by every sin we commit: and, 3. His being *infinitely just*. I shall reserve the two latter considerations for my next discourse, and at present speak only of his *infinite knowledge*, which therefore shall be the whole subject of this entertainment.

A criminal, who is to be tried for his life, is apt to comfort himself in some measure with the flattering hopes, that either the indictment will

will not be fully proved against him, or that the witnesses may be bought off, or that the judge, whom he has never personally offended, may be moved to compassion, and not proceed against him according to the utmost rigour of the law. But a criminal, who is to have *Christ* for his judge, cannot comfort himself with any of these flattering thoughts. And nothing but a conscience free from mortal sin can hinder sentence of eternal death from passing upon him.

First, then, all hope of having any thing concealed or palliated is utterly excluded by the *infinite wisdom* and *knowledge* of the divine person who is to be our judge: For as nothing can resist an *infinite power*, so nothing can escape the penetration of an *infinite knowledge*; which though it be in itself above our comprehension, it is however necessary to form the best idea of it we can, since without it we cannot rightly apprehend how terrible a thing it is for a criminal to appear before, and have his eternal lot decided by a judge of that character: Now, though nothing that is *infinite* can be fully comprehended by us, yet some imperfect idea may be formed of the *infinite knowledge* of God, by comparing it with the knowledge of created intellectual beings, or by considering it in its effects, and with relation to the government of this world.

As to the knowledge of created intellectual beings, though that of the *angels*, who are pure intellectual spirits, be very great, and surpasses by many degrees the largest capacity of human understanding, yet being *created*, it is by consequence *limited*. The eternal wisdom has set bounds to it as to the ocean, and said, *thus far it shall go, and no farther*: Nay, though God should every moment to the world's end, create angels, still perfecter in knowledge, yet the perfectest

fectest of them would still say, with St. *Michael*, *quis ut Deus? Who is as God?* Because a knowledge, which is *infinite*, that is, unlimited and without bounds, cannot be measured by one that is limited: A single drop of water has a proportion to the whole ocean: God perfectly knows what the proportion is, and can make an exact enumeration of the number of drops which suffice to compose that vast body of waters; because both the one and the other are limited, and have their bounds precisely measured out: But the distance between a limited and unlimited perfection, is always *infinite*, and to whatever perfection the knowledge of a creature may be raised, it is not so much as the smallest drop of water to the whole ocean, if compared to the infinite wisdom and knowledge of God.

However, our idea of it will be still raised higher, if we consider it in its effects, and with relation to the government of the world: Consider therefore this vast bulk of the terrestrial globe, and the air that encompasses it: The earth inhabited by millions of souls, adorned with a prodigious variety of trees, plants, and flowers, and affording nourishment both above ground, and within its bowels, to innumerable sensitive creatures: the seas, lakes, and rivers stocked with fish, and the air with fowl: Then consider again, that although this prodigious body of the universe has already subsisted for many ages, yet it continues still as vigorous in all its productions, and as regular and uniform, in passing yearly through all that admirable succession and variety of seasons, as it was in the very beginning of its creation: The order of nature is regularly maintained, the same causes produce the same effects now, as they did above
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five thousand years ago; and though all mankind, and other living creatures, be daily supplied by the earth, sea and air, yet their stores are neither exhausted nor diminished by it.

Here then we may justly cry out, with *St. Paul*, *O the depth of the riches, of the wisdom, and of the knowledge of God!* which neither length of time can wear out, nor distance of place divide, nor variety of objects distract, nor multiplicity of business perplex or weaken? *A thousand years*, says the royal prophet, *are before thine eyes like yesterday, which is just past.* And so a thousand different objects, nay, if you please, a million of millions, are no more than a single one of the most trivial nature, to the infinite wisdom and knowledge of God. Because being infinite, it cannot be confined either by number or place, but *reaching strongly from end to end*, is present to all objects, times and places; and disposes, moves, and governs all things with the same immoveable tranquillity, order, and attention, as if it had but one single creature to inspect and provide for.

Neither must we imagine that his infinite wisdom only applies itself to the most weighty concerns of this world, and leaves the rest to chance, or the pure course of nature: For *Christ* himself has taken care to instruct us, that the *divine providence*, and by consequence, *knowledge*, extends itself even to the most trivial things, as the *numbering the very hairs of our heads*, or the destiny of a little bird scarce worth a farthing: *Are not two sparrows*, says *Christ*, *sold for a farthing, and one of them shall not fall to the ground without your Father.* After which nothing more can be said to heighten our idea of the unsearchable depth and boundless extent of an infinite knowledge, particularly as it regards
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the great business of the last day, and the strict account to be made in it: For, if amongst so many millions of creatures as are the object of God's providence, even so inconsiderable a one as a *sparrow is not forgotten before the Father*, as St. Luke expresses it; if the government of the whole universe, with all the weighty affairs transacted in it, cannot hinder him from taking an exact cognizance of the number even of the *hairs of our heads*, we may, in some measure, conceive how terrible a thing it will be to appear before a judge so infinitely knowing; and conclude, that not even the smallest circumstance of the longest life will pass without being strictly examined by him.

We must therefore, consider the infinite knowledge of God as a vast book, in which all our thoughts, words, and deeds, with every circumstance relating to them, are distinctly and particularly set down: Nothing will be forgot, nothing omitted, nothing disguised; not even the most secret intentions and motives upon which we have acted: And in the moment we appear before the sacred tribunal, *this book will be opened*, as St. John expresses it, and give us as clear a view of all the particulars of our lives, as if we saw them written in the beams of the sun: *Ordinabuntur ante infelicem animam omnia peccata sua*, says St. Austin, Serm. 181.; that is, *the unhappy sinner shall see all his sins ranged in exact order before him*: Not only those that have been committed in public, but those also which he has industriously concealed from the eyes of men. *There is nothing covered*, says Christ, *that shall not be revealed, nor hid, that shall not be known*. All his hypocrisy will be unmasked, and his works of darkness exposed in the clearest light: For, *darkness*, says the royal prophet,
shall

shall not be hid from thee, and night shall be enlightened like day. The sins of youth, which have been long forgot by the criminal, will be presented as fresh before him, as if they had been committed that very day : *Because a thousand years are before God's eyes like yesterday, which is just past ;* and those, which have been overlooked, either through culpable ignorance, or wilful neglect, will appear on account, not according to the erroneous judgment made of them, by a biased and partial conscience, but as they are in themselves, and the unerring judgment of God.

But this is not all : For not only the sins we have committed, but also the duties we have omitted, and the favours we have received, and not profited by, will be brought to light, and an account demanded of them : They are all faithfully set down in the great book of accounts, and neither the number of years we have lived, nor the variety of circumstances through which our lives have passed, will in the least perplex the evidence or confound the exact order with which they will be produced against us. *The unhappy sinner will see all his sins ranged in order before him.*

Here all the time we have embezzled or mispent, the talents we have buried under ground, the temporal blessings we have abused, and the graces we have neglected, will be manifested with the utmost convincing evidence. And since there is no state of life but has many duties incumbent on it, the omission of those duties will be a separate article in the indictment brought against us : Many persons, free, perhaps, from sins in their private lives, will be found great sinners, when considered in their public capacities. *A prince, a magistrate, a pastor,*

tor, a parent, or master of a family, have many more besides themselves to answer for : Abuses in a government or community, that might and ought to have been reformed, will be charged upon the magistrate or superior, by whom they have been tolerated or connived at ; sinful disorders, not corrected in a family, will be placed on account to the master or mistress of it, though they were not personally guilty of them ; children lost by the neglect of their parents, will be required at their hands. And so it will be, in relation to all the respective duties of the station in which God has placed us.

Hence it appears, how terrible a thing it will be for a sinner, dying in impenitence, to fall into the hands of an omniscient judge, who, with a ray of that infinite light in which he dwells, will dissipate in an instant all the darkness he has not only lived in but indulged, and discover to him, at one single view, the whole state of his unhappy soul. Oh ! what a dreadful sight will it be for an unfortunate criminal to see, not only all his own personal sins committed, from the first use of reason to his dying day, all the abuses of God's favour, and all the omissions he has ever been guilty of, but over and above all, the sins of others, to which he has been accessory, placed before him all at once, in so clear a light, that it will be impossible for him either to deny, excuse, or answer any one single point laid to his charge.

We may in some measure conceive the terror, confusion, and despair this will cause in a criminal soul, if we but consider, what a torment it is to a conscience charged with many crimes, to enter seriously into itself, even in this life. For since men are usually afraid to look their sins in the face, and do what they can to turn
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their thoughts away from them; since it is evident, from experience, that a guilty conscience, whose remorses cannot be avoided, is a kind of hell upon earth, and that the anguish and terror of it has driven some to the most violent extremities even in this world, where there is always hope of mercy, where there are many intervals of ease, where no man can see the whole number of his sins at once, nor any one of them in its full deformity: 'This, I say, being the case of a criminal conscience, even in this world, what an unspeakable torture will it be to a sinner dying in impenitence, when in the moment that death closes the eyes of his body, and opens those of his soul, he sees, at a single view, that vast multitude of sins, with which his conscience stands charged, clearly and distinctly before him, attended with all the aggravating circumstances, which are often more enormous, and cause a heavier load of confusion, than the sins themselves; and all this without any hopes of mercy or comfort! Because the same light, which discovers to him the number and enormity of his sins, makes him also clearly see his doom, and everlasting exclusion from all farther share in the mercies of God.

I shall conclude this discourse with two practical reflections. The first regards those, who seem to be well enough at ease, so they can but hide their sins from the knowledge of men, and therefore stick not to do those things before the all-seeing eyes of God, which they would certainly forbear to do, if they but suspected that they were within the observation of the meanest creature upon earth. Now, though we must allow that this cautious way of sinning, is at least a mark that they who practise it have not lost all shame (which is always a commendable quality,

quality, and prevents the guilt of public scandal) yet we cannot but say, that their proceeding is very unaccountable, in that they are so much awed by mere human respects, and the fear of confusion before men, and have at the same time no regard to the knowledge and judgment of God, whom they know to be actually present to, and an eye-witness of, every sin they commit.

These therefore ought to reflect frequently and seriously upon the following truths: 1. That whenever they sin, though ever so secretly, it is in the presence of him who is one day to be their judge. 2. That he not only knows all their sins, but keeps an account of them, and lays them up against the *day of wrath*, to be then brought to light, to their eternal confusion. 3. That it avails them nothing to keep up a reputation with men, whilst at the same time they forfeit the favour and esteem of God, by whose judgment alone they must stand or fall. *Lastly*, That after all, they will be disappointed, even as to what they seem to take most to heart, *viz.* the concealment of their sins from men. Because, in the last *general judgment*, every thing will be made known, and even their most secret sins exposed to the view of all mankind. If these truths were deeply imprinted in mens' hearts, and not only believed, but sensibly felt by them, which can only be the effect of a long and serious meditation, it is not to be doubted, but they would by degrees become a happy restraint even upon the most violent inclinations, and make men at least as much afraid to transgress in the presence of Almighty God, as before a person for whose judgment and esteem they have a real value.

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My second reflection regards those, who through shame either lay aside the use of the sacraments, or, what is worse, become guilty of sacrilege, by the concealment of some sin in confession. I own, some tempers, naturally bashful and reserved, are much to be pitied in this point; but whatever their difficulty may be, it must be overcome: And it is hard to say, whether the *sin* or *folly* in being overcome by it be greater. I shall hereafter treat both the one and the other at large; at present I shall only touch upon the latter, as it has a connection with the great truth I have laid before you, which sets the *folly* of this sin in its strongest and clearest light, and shews plainly that the persons guilty of it are no less wanting to reason and good sense, than their duty: For ask but a person of the meanest capacity, when the choice of two evils is proposed, which of the two is to be preferred, the *lesser* or the *greater*? And he will certainly answer, the *lesser*. Ask a criminal, whether he will rather choose a private disgrace, or public ignominy? and you may be sure he will not spend much time in deliberating upon the matter, because a private disgrace is the lesser evil of the two.

Now, this is the very case of a person guilty of some crime committed against God. He must either submit to a private confusion, in accusing himself of it to his confessor, or undergo the public ignominy of having it one day exposed, to his eternal shame and confusion, before the eyes of all the world. One of the two must be; and he has it now in his power to choose either the one or the other. The first is but a momentary confusion, followed immediately by an entire repose and ease of conscience; and so private, that no man alive but his con-

fessor can have any knowledge of it. The other is a public disgrace, in the face of God, and all his saints and angels : And the violent impression of shame and confusion, which it makes upon the soul in that moment, will last for all eternity. I ask then, whether a person can pretend to be in his right senses, if he prefers the latter ? The case is too plain against him to admit of a dispute.

Let us then beseech Almighty God to imprint in our hearts so deep a sense of his infinite knowledge, and the strict account we shall be called to, that whether we be in public or private, in company or alone, we may be afraid to do any thing displeasing to his pure eyes, and for which we shall be exposed to everlasting confusion hereafter.

THE TENTH ENTERTAINMENT.

TWO OTHER QUALITIES OF THE JUDGE.

He will render to every one according to his deeds.
Rom. ii. 6.

IN my last discourse, I promised to consider three things in the judge before whom we are to appear : 1. His infinite knowledge, from which nothing can be concealed : 2. His being the very person whom we offend by every sin we commit : and, 3. His being infinitely just. I have already spoken of the first. The two latter considerations shall therefore be the subject of this entertainment.

We shall be able to conceive, in some measure, how great a terror it will be to appear before a judge, who is the very person that has been offended and injured by us, if we but consider the repugnance all men naturally have to see those

to whom they have done any remarkable injury or affront. A person who is conscious to himself of having been notoriously ungrateful to his benefactor, suffers a sensible mortification in appearing before him. His blushes betray the inward shame and trouble of his mind; because the presence and sight of his benefactor revive in it the idea of his favours, and the ill returns he has made for them. A wife, that has abused the conjugal bed, unless she be an abandoned creature, and lost to all shame, cannot bear the sight of her husband, if she knows for certain that he is informed of the injustice she has done him. So a subject, who has betrayed his prince, dreads nothing more than to appear before him; because his very presence is a reproach to his guilty conscience, and upbraids him with the foulness of his crime. Thus *Adam* had no sooner eaten the forbidden fruit, but he hid himself from the face of the Lord; and that which till then had been his greatest glory and delight, became all on a sudden his greatest terror.

But the history of *Joseph* and his brothers affords one of the most remarkable instances of this truth. You all know how they contrived his death; but upon the remonstrances of *Judah*, sold him to certain merchants, who carried him away into *Egypt*, and there sold him for a slave; where some years after he was, by God's providence, raised to the highest dignity, and made superintendant of all *Egypt*. At which time, by the same disposition of providence, there happened a great dearth all the world over, and *Joseph's* brothers, amongst others, were obliged to go into *Egypt* to buy corn of him. He knew them all at the very first interview, but was not known by them till some days after, he discovered himself in the following manner: Having

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ordered those who were present to withdraw, and being alone with his brothers, he gave full vent to the tenderness of his heart, and bursting out into a flood of tears, he only spoke these kind words to them; *Fear not, I am your brother Joseph: Is my father still alive?* At which discovery of himself, though in so tender a manner, the scripture tells us, they were all struck dumb with excessive fear. *Non poterant respondere fratres, nimio terrore perterriti.* The unexpected sight of a brother, and that in such happy circumstances, which would have caused a transport of joy in others, seized them with terror and confusion; because his presence revived, in an instant, a fresh remembrance of all the injustice they had done him, as if they had committed it that very day.

This is a weak representation of what will happen to reprobate sinners in the moment that Christ shall manifest himself visible to them: For as the sight of him, all glorious, impassible, and immortal, will be the glory, joy, and comfort of the elect, so will it be terror of the wicked. *Videntes turbabuntur timore horribili:* Seeing him they shall be struck with a dreadful fear, says the word of God; because they shall see in him a *benefactor*, whom they have repaid with ingratitude; a *spouse*, whom they have abused; a *sovereign*, whom they have betrayed; and a *brother*, whom they have many times sold for a sordid interest, or brutal pleasure.

But he will not then say to them as *Joseph* did, *fear not, I am your brother*, nor shed tears of compassion over them; but, on the contrary, the very terror and majesty of his looks will in an instant convince them, that he who till then had been their injured *saviour* and *redeemer*, is now come to be their *judge*. *Horrende apparebit,*

says



says the wise man : *He will appear to them in a dreadful manner.* He will then shew them the precious blood they have trampled upon by their sacrilegious communions ; the sacred body they have crucified afresh, and put to open shame, by their scandalous lives ; and the wounds of his hands and feet, and sacred side, which they have renewed a thousand times by their enormous crimes. St. *Austin* represents him speaking to them in this manner : *Videte vulnera, quæ infixistis, agnoscite latus, quod pupugistis :* That is, *See the wounds you inflicted, see the side you have pierced.* Oh ! what a dreadful sight will this be ! The sight of a judge, who has been despised, mocked and crucified by the criminal whose doom he is going to pronounce : The sight of a judge, who knows every aggravating circumstance of all the crimes he has ever committed against him ; finally, the sight of a judge, who is *infinitely just*, and will accordingly do himself justice to the utmost rigour.

Now this last quality, I mean his *infinite justice*, added to the two former, renders the case of a person dying in mortal sin, and summoned before the tribunal of Christ, not only frightful beyond imagination, but utterly desperate. For though his judge were *infinitely knowing*, though he were the *party offended* in all his crimes, yet if there were still room for mercy, if the judge were capable of being either biassed by interest or inclination, or moved with compassion, to mitigate at least the sentence, and not pronounce against him according to the utmost rigour of justice, this would be at least some comfort. But the judge is not only just, but *infinitely just* : and an *infinite justice*, joined with an *infinite knowledge* of the merits of the cause, excludes all hopes of any milder sentence,

than precisely what the number and quality of his sins have deserved: Because justice, as it regards the office of a judge, is a virtue which determines him to bestow rewards, and inflict punishments, exactly proportioned to the merits of the cause he has before him. So that the greatest saint will be judged by Christ, with the same exactness and equality of justice as the greatest sinner: Because, as *St. Paul* tells us, *he will render to every man according to his works.*

In this world indeed things are not so. Justice is often perverted, either through the weakness or corruption of the judge: And so it happens many times, that innocence is oppressed, and wickedness is rewarded, or at least unpunished. But suppose justice were always administered impartially, yet in this world there would seldom be an exact equality between the punishment and the crime; because this equality is wholly unknown to men, which by consequence makes most human laws defective; and where the rule itself is defective, the practice guided by it must be so too. So that the justice of this world is but a faint shadow of that of the other, where every thing will be according to exact weight and measure: and therefore, as every saint in Heaven will possess a degree of glory exactly proportioned to the merits of his past good works, so will every damned soul in Hell have his degree of torments measured out to him with the most exact proportion to the number, quality and each aggravating circumstance of his sins. *Quantum fuit in deliciis, tantum date illi tormenta*; that is, *as much as he has been in delights, so much torment let him suffer*, will be the doom of *Babylon*, and of every reprobate soul: And this exact proportion will be determined

mined in the very instant that the criminal soul appears before the tribunal of Christ.

Neither will he have the least regard to the riches, titles, or dignity of any person: for *there is no respect of persons with God*, who hates sin, and will punish it with equal rigour wherever he finds it. So that before the great tribunal, there will be no distinction between king and subjects, masters and servants, but that which is grounded upon the merits or demerits of their lives past. Nay, *greatness* and *wealth* will rather entitle the possessors to a severer judgment: because they are *talents*, with which they are entrusted, and an account will be demanded, whether they have employed them to the benefit or prejudice of their own and neighbours souls. A great man is generally either a *great good* or a *great evil* to mankind, and the instrument either of God's *wrath* or *mercy*, on those who depend upon him: and therefore, as he seldom goes unattended either to Hell or Heaven, so his reward will be the greater in proportion to the number he has helped to save, and his torments will likewise receive an additional increase to the score of every person, to whose damnation he has been accessary, by the power and influence of his example, or otherwise. And so this sacred oracle, *potentes potentior tormenta patientur*, that is, *the mighty shall suffer mighty torments*, which makes their greatness the measure of the punishment, will be fully verified of them.

Thus will the infinite justice of God exert itself in the last day, by inflicting punishments with an equal and impartial hand, and demanding of every man the last farthing of the debt he has contracted. And this debt will be computed not only by the number and quality of the

the sins he has committed and not satisfied for, but also by the benefits he has received, whether temporal or spiritual; of which there will be a dreadful example in those cities where Christ preached, and wrought many miracles without fruit; since he himself, who is to be their judge, has already pronounced this terrible sentence upon them, that even the wicked cities of *Sodom* and *Gomorrha*, *will in the day of judgment be more favourably treated than they*: Because that signal blessing of his preaching, and working miracles amongst them, being a *talent* received, and not improved, must be accounted for, and will but serve to increase the reckoning: And therefore as it will aggravate the debt contracted by their other sins, so will it in the same proportion increase their punishment. And this will also be the unhappy case of reprobate *Christians*, who having received and abused favours far surpassing those of the *Jews*, will by consequence receive a far severer judgment than they, and be the most unfortunate of all human creatures.

Nor is this exact severity of God's *justice* in the other world, any ways derogatory from that *infinite mercy* so much extolled in holy writ. For as God is infinite in all his attributes, so his mercy is that peculiar one, by which he chiefly delights to manifest himself to men during the course of this mortal life. *His mercies* (says the prophet) *are above all his works*. And even his *omnipotence* (according to the celebrated prayer of the church) shews itself in nothing so much as in the *works of his mercy*. But since all outward communications of the divine attributes in this world are created effects, and all created effects are limited, it follows, that though God's mercy be infinite in itself, it has its stinted bounds in relation to creatures. The source itself is inexhaustible,

haustible, and flows incessantly upon all men in this life, whether saints or sinners, though not with the same profusion. But the whole course of its stream is in an instant turned away from a sinner dying in impenitence.

So that the whole life of a man may properly be called the time of mercy. No sinner's case is so desperate, but God has provided remedies for it. His arms are stretched out to receive him. The fountains of grace are always open, and the sacred blood of Christ, which they contain, suffices to wash away the blackest crimes. So that nothing but his own perverse will can hinder him from applying its infinite virtue to itself, and becoming partaker of the *plentiful redemption* which he has prepared for all. Now these are all undoubted instances of an infinite mercy. But the fruit and application of it, in relation to the soul of any impenitent sinner, ceases in the very moment that the soul goeth out of his body. He enters then into another world, where *justice* takes place, and performs its part, as *mercy* did in the most bountiful manner, whilst he was in a state to be partaker of it. But having been deaf to the very last, to all its calls and solicitations, he then falls into the hands of rigorous justice, is summoned before its sacred tribunal, and receives his unchangeable doom precisely according to his works.

For this reason, the last day is never mentioned in holy scripture, but in terms proper to strike the heart with terror. It is called the *day of wrath*. *A day of calamity and distress*. *A day exceedingly bitter*. But why is it that the word of God has represented a day, on which our eternal interest depends, and is by consequence so terrible in itself, in such frightful colours, as seem to heighten rather than mitigate the

the terror of it? Is it to throw us into despair, or weaken our confidence in the mercies of our divine redeemer? By no means. On the contrary, the only end it aims at is to season our souls with a wholesome fear: That fear, I say, which the *psalmist* calls the *beginning of wisdom*: That fear, which keeps the balance of the soul equally poised between *presumption* and *despair*: Finally, that fear, which naturally puts us upon our guard against the danger that threatens us, and by spurring us on to a vigorous war against sin, and the practice of good works, lays the foundation of a solid confidence in God, and a sincere love of him.

Hence the *psalmist* calls the *man blessed, who fears the Lord, because he shall take great delight in his commandments*. And the wise man tells us, that *fear shall delight the heart*. But how is this? since we find by experience, that what we do out of fear, is rather a painful constraint upon nature, than a source of delight or pleasure. But the answer is clear and easy. For, though it be certainly true, that if the work of our salvation were to be carried on by mere *servile fear*, we should find but little comfort in the path of God's commandments; yet if we consider, that we are not to stop there, but pass on to a better disposition? if we consider that *fear* is but the harbinger of *love*, and prepares the way to it, by removing obstacles, and applying us to proper means to introduce it, we shall have no difficulty to conceive that *fear* is no enemy to true pleasure, that is, to the solid repose of our souls; but, on the contrary, is wholly in its interest, as being an instrument, encourager, and promoter of it.

The reason, therefore, why fear is said to be the *beginning of wisdom*, and a source of *delight*
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to the soul, is because what is first begun by *fear* is improved gradually, and perfected by *love*. Fear is as the centinel that gives the first alarm, and warns us of the approaching danger. But whilst we are fighting for God's cause with the arms of prayer, and other holy exercises proper for our spiritual combat, love comes in, and takes the command into his hands, and when love commands in the heart, every thing is performed with delight: so that fear is as necessary to secure our souls, as centinels and advanced guards are necessary to secure an army, when an enemy is near. Which made the wise man declare, that it is impossible to be justified without fear. *Qui sine timore est non poterit justificari.* Eccl. i. ver. 28.

In effect, the first step to a sinner's conversion, is usually owing to a lively apprehension of the severity of God's judgments. This gives a check to the violence of his passions. This makes him solicitous to discover and practice the means necessary to avoid the dreadful evils that threaten him. His practising these means enlightens by degrees his understanding, softens the heart, and inflames the will. And so it is that *love* is introduced, and accomplishes the work of salvation, which was at first begun through mere *servile fear*.

If therefore upon hearing or reading a severe truth any one finds himself seized with fear, let not that dishearten him; it is a good symptom, and he has reason to hope in God's mercies, because he fears his justice. *Pierce my heart with thy fear*, was the prayer of the royal prophet. For it is God himself inspires us with this disposition, for our greater security; since those who are abandoned by him, neither fear him,
nor

nor desire to fear him ; because it disturbs their pleasures, and self-love is uneasy with it ; but the love of God finds its account in it, in being not only introduced, but fortified and secured by it.

We ought therefore to fear God, that we may love him, and we ought never to cease to fear him, that we may never cease to love him. The more we fear him now, the greater will our security be, when we come to die. *Timenti, Dominum bene erit in extremis*, says Solomon ; *He who fears the Lord, will be easy in the end of his days*. And when Death summons him to appear before the tribunal of Christ, he will stand before him, not with the terror of a criminal going to receive the sentence of eternal death, but with the confidence of a faithful servant, expecting the full recompence of his last labours, in the enjoyment of a happy eternity.

THE ELEVENTH ENTERTAINMENT.

THE EXAMINATION TO BE MADE OF OUR
HIDDEN SINS.

I am not conscious to myself of any thing ; yet am I not hereby justified : But he that judgeth me is the Lord. 1 Cor. iv. 4.

THIS was spoken by a saint of the first class, who after his conversion, devoted himself wholly to the service of *Jesus Christ* and his holy church. His labours and sufferings for the planting of the gospel were without intermission ; and nothing but the most ardent zeal, for the honour and interest of his master, could have supported him under the many hardships, outrages,

rages, and persecutions to which his sacred ministry continually exposed him. - God has also manifested his holiness by many miracles; and his being caught up to the third Heaven, was an undoubted pledge of the high degree of favour to which God had raised him; yet amidst the eminent virtues that shined in him, the faithful discharge of his laborious ministry, and the favours God had heaped upon him, joined with a conscience entirely free from reproach, this great saint was not without some fear of the judgment of the *searcher of hearts*; as appears from the forementioned words of my text; *I am not*, says he, *conscious to myself of any thing*: yet *I am not hereby justified*. But he that judgeth me is the Lord.

This contains a very useful and instructive lesson, warning us not to be over confident of ourselves, whatever virtue we may seem to possess. There are many Christians (and it were to be wished the number were far greater) who, though inferior by many degrees to the merits of St. Paul, yet leading a kind of regular and innocent life, may in some measure say with him, that *they are not conscious to themselves of any thing*; that is, of any noted crime, or remarkable transgression of the law of God. But can this give them any entire security of being justified? St. Paul says positively it cannot, *because he that judgeth me is the Lord*.

Hence it follows manifestly, that there are *hidden sins* known to God alone, for which however we are to be accountable to him. The proud *Pharisee*, mentioned in the gospel, was not conscious to himself of any thing: Nay, he had a great opinion of his own virtue and merits. Yet we all know how criminal he was in the sight of God. The case of the Bishop of *Laodicea*,

dicea, mentioned in the third chapter of the *Revelations*, was much the same: For he was fully satisfied with the state he was in, imagining himself to be *rich* in grace and merits. Whereas the searcher of hearts ordered St. *John* to let him know, that he was *wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked*. Rev. iii. 17.

Thus many are apt to over-rate their own merits, and be misled by it into a security, which usually becomes the mother of sloth, tepidity, and presumption. They see themselves free from the customary vices of mankind (and it is doubtless a blessing to be highly valued, and acknowledged with the deepest sense of gratitude), but they consider not with St. *Paul*, that *He who judgeth is the Lord*, and that by consequence there may be many defects and blemishes in their souls, which escape their notice, but cannot escape the pure and all discerning eyes of him who will judge them, not according to what they appear to themselves or others, but according to what they really are. I shall, therefore, in this entertainment, lay down some genuine reasons for which the most virtuous, in appearance, may mistrust themselves on the score of *hidden sins*, whereof there will be a strict examination made on the great day of accounts.

These are two sorts of hidden sins, which will be placed to our account on the day of judgment. *First*, Those which we know to be sins, but through heedlessness seldom observe ourselves to be guilty of them. And, *2dly*, Those which we commit with sufficient reflection, but persuade ourselves to be no sins. As to the former sort, which are occasioned by heedlessness, and want of care, every one may make
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some guess to what degree he may be concerned in them, by only reflecting in what measure he has been wanting in his endeavours to prevent them. For they that live in a state of idleness, indulging themselves in all the dangerous liberties of the world, or are naturally of a negligent and heedless temper, and take no care to arm themselves against this evil; these, I say, may reasonably suspect themselves accountable for many secret sins:

1. Of *Omission*, particularly in the neglect of duties relating to their respective state or calling.

2. Of *Thought*, by being guilty of many rash judgments to the prejudice of their neighbour; by thoughts of revenge, or such as are contrary to Christian purity; by ill wishes, or unlawful desires; and the like.

3. Of the *Tongue*, by back-biting or worldly discourses; by spreading or improving uncharitable reports, and so forth; to say nothing of the many sins they may be guilty of, by performing the best part of their actions purely upon motives of self-interest, vanity, or other human respects: for if even those, who keep a constant watch upon themselves, are nevertheless apt not only to be surpris'd into, but even to overlook many of the sins here mentioned, how jealous ought they to be of themselves, who live without ease, speak without caution, let their thoughts and tongue run at random; and seldom look into themselves to observe the motions and intentions of their hearts? Truly, it is morally impossible but persons of this character must fall into many sins of which they have no knowledge; or if at times some checks of conscience, serve as monitors to give them notice, of what they are thinking or saying amiss,

amiss, these generally go off without leaving any lasting impression, being either stifled or diverted by other thoughts crowding in upon them. And whereas these careless and slothful Christians seldom give themselves the trouble of a diligent examination of conscience at night, by means whereof the most considerable failings of each day might be discovered, and laid up safe in their memories, in order to be brought to a more rigorous account in their next confession; the unavoidable consequence of this neglect is, that many even of those sins, which they took notice of in the committing, go by degrees out of their minds, and so perhaps are never more thought of, till death and judgment brings them to light. And though God alone, who is to be the judge, can tell in what measure sins thus overlooked or forgot will be laid to their charge, it is certain, however, that the more wilful the neglect has been, the less room there will be for mercy, unless heartily repented of, and amended in due time.

Now, as to what relates to those *hidden sins*, which we commit with sufficient reflection, but persuade ourselves to be no sins, the root of these is a *culpable* or *affected ignorance*, occasioned either by *neglect*, *insincerity*, *prevention*, or the *delusion of self-love*: For the clearer understanding whereof, we are to observe, that there are two sorts of *ignorance*, viz. an *invincible* and a *culpable* one. A person is said to labour under an *invincible ignorance*, when he never had it in his power to inform himself of the truth: And this ignorance, being without any fault on his side, excuses from sin; nor will any omissions or transgressions occasioned by it be laid to his charge.

But

But a person is *culpably ignorant*, when it is his own fault that he knows no better; and this is the case of all those who either wilfully shut their eyes against the truth, or out of *stubb*, and want of concern for their souls, neglect the ordinary means appointed by God for their being sufficiently instructed in their duty. Now, it is a great mistake to imagine, that this ignorance will be any excuse in favour of those who are concerned in it, because it is their own fault, if they transgress for want of knowing their duty; since they might have known it, had they but taken care to inform themselves: and therefore, as their ignorance is wilful, so all the miscarriages occasioned by it are also wilful, and by consequence inexcusable. But as *neglect*, or want of care is the occasion of ignorance in some, so *insincerity* is a no less ordinary root of it in others. Many seem very solicitous to know what is lawful or unlawful in certain doubtful cases: they pretend to take advice, and shew a readiness to follow it; but being insincere at heart, and rather afraid than really desirous to know the truth, they use double-dealing in their pretended search of it, by mistating their case, and either adding some material circumstance, which wholly disguises the true nature of it, or concealing something which might give light to those they consult. By this means their directors, who have no reason to mistrust any such unfair dealing, are imposed upon; and misjudging their case, give their opinion or advice accordingly: And thus, instead of shewing them the way to Heaven, are the innocent occasion of their being misled, or confirmed in their former errors. But though the deluded directors be innocent in this case, those who trepan them into an approbation of what is really

really unwarrantable, are far from being so; and though they may, in some measure, stifle the murmurs of conscience, by foolishly persuading themselves that they act according to the direction or consent of their spiritual guides, their pretended ignorance, under which they imagine to shelter themselves, will avail them nothing at the great day of accounts, and all their transgressions occasioned by it, stand in full against them.

Another fruitful source of hidden sins is a *strong prevention*, imbibed either by education or the discourses of persons whose judgment, and even virtue, we have a great opinion of. This was the case of the *Jewish people*, who having a great opinion of the learning and virtue of the *Pharisees*, were, by their discourses and malicious insinuations, so violently prepossessed against our blessed Saviour, that they even demanded his death. It is true, this prevention may be very innocent, as long as it regards only *indifferent things* or *opinions*, and is not heightened into party-zeal, so as to cause warm disputes, whereby charity is often wounded. But if it regards the reputation of any person, or, what is worse, of a great number of persons, and is at the same time wholly groundless, and by consequence unjust, as it often happens, then it is far from being innocent: Nay, it is the root of numberless sins; 1st, Because persons under this prevention seldom make any scruple of entertaining the most rash and uncharitable judgment, of those against whom they are thus prepossessed; and, 2^{dly}, Because these rash judgments are the immediate source of innumerable defamations, whereby persons of solid virtue and merit have often been ruined, both in their reputation and fortune, and there-
by

by rendered incapable of being serviceable to their neighbour, in the station wherein God has placed them. And will the God of justice leave such crying injustices unpunished ! Or will they be excused by a pretended ignorance ! I fear not, as long as the parties concerned stop their ears, to every thing that may disabuse them of their error, and have them only open to hear reports proper to nourish and strengthen their prevention ; which renders their ignorance wholly inexcusable, because they have it in their power to be delivered from it, if they please.

A fourth root of culpable ignorance, is an *irregular inclination* or *secret passion* in the soul ; for every degree of passion being attended with a proportionable degree of spiritual blindness, the judgment is always more or less biaſſed or corrupted by it, and preposſeſſed in favour of it ; and ſo if any doubt ariſes concerning what is lawful or unlawful, it is ever apt to lean on that ſide which flatters the favourite inclination. Thus an erroneous conſcience is formed by degrees, the *gospel* is accommodated to corrupt nature, and the *narrow way* to Heaven is made broad enough for ſelf-love to walk in ; yet conſcience is all the while pretended to be the guide ; and ſo it is ; but it is a conſcience of their forming, who ſtudy to deceive themſelves, and is therefore modelled in all things ſuitable to the inclination that is to be gratified.

It is according to this ſort of conſcience, that many make no ſcruple at all to wrong their creditors, and often put them to the greateſt hardſhips, by reſuſing or unreaſonably delaying to pay their debts : which however is, in many caſes, the ſame injuſtice as cheating or robbing them of their money. It is according to the
ſame

same sort of conscience, that many sicken not to employ the most unfair and illegal means to make their fortune, or increase their wealth. Their only care is not to come within the reach of human laws; but they consider not, that they must one day appear before a tribunal, where *he that judgeth is the Lord*. Finally, it is according to this sort of conscience, that many, having their hearts fixed upon the world, indulging themselves in all its dangerous pleasures, and living almost in a total forgetfulness of Almighty God, and neglect of the duties relating to him, yet think all is well, and cry those down as indiscreetly rigid, who profess and teach a stricter morality. And what is the root of all this wilful and affected ignorance, but some secret passion in the soul, which being a false bias upon the judgment, inclines it to approve or think favourably of every thing that flatters that passion? And thus they walk on blindly in the way of perdition, in hopes to meet Heaven at the end of it, till death opens their eyes, and shews them the fatal error they have lived under.

The last great root of *hidden sins*, is a *slothful* and *lukewarm* temper, which easily betrays those who are guilty of it even to sins whereby God's grace may be forfeited, and that without being aware of it; for if we examine the nature of *sloth*, we shall find that a considerable degree of it, especially when it becomes an habitual indisposition, suffices alone to create mistrust of the state of the soul infected with it. The reason is, because a considerable degree of sloth seems altogether inconsistent with two of the most essential duties of a Christian, *viz. the love of God above all things*, and the obligation he has to *seek first the kingdom of God*.

That

That it seems wholly inconsistent with the love of God above all things, appears plainly from the very opposition of their natures and effects, which run all directly counter to one another : for sloth is *indifferent, languid, and unactive* in every thing that has a relation to God ; always inclining us to our ease and satisfaction ; whereas the love of God, when it is mistress of the heart, is *eager, watchful, vigorous, and active* in all the concerns of eternity : It renders us solicitous to know the will of God, ready to obey it, and desirous to please him in all things : In effect, whomsoever we love with an absolute preference to all others, we are always solicitous to serve and please ? And, therefore, when little or nothing of this appears in relation to God, it is a strong symptom that the love of him is not the prevailing disposition of the heart.

The same is to be said in reference to the great duty incumbent on all Christians, of *seeking first the kingdom of God* ; for how can the slothful Christian, who performs all duties that have an immediate relation to God in a careless manner, be said to make Heaven his chief concern ? Or with what probability can we judge it to be the principal object of his desires, when we see him languid and indifferent in the pursuit of it ? Change but the case from Heaven to the world, and see whether an earnest desire of its goods be ever without an earnest and vigorous application to obtain them. Does a man that thirsts after interest or honour, leave any means untried that favour his desires, or obstacle unremoved that stands in his way ? Does he not use all his endeavours possible to compass the end he aims at ? and take all precautions necessary to prevent a disappointment ? These
are

are doubtless the methods of the children of this world; and the reason is, because their desires are eager, and eager desires admit of no indifference or sloth. They naturally inspire the soul with vigour, put life into her, and spur her on to action, allowing her no rest till all be done that can contribute to render them successful.

And is there not then ground enough to conclude the *kingdom of God* is not very earnestly desired, when nothing of this spirit, life and vigour appears towards the gaining of it; but, on the contrary, every thing is carried on with coldness, negligence, and sloth? The consequence is but too clear; and there follows another no less clearly from it, *viz.* that however a person of this character may value himself upon his virtue, he has reason enough to mistrust the state of his soul, especially if to the two fore-mentioned considerations be added the danger such a one is in of coming often indisposed to the *sacrament*.

The reason is, because considering the habits such a one has of doing things negligently and by halves, it is much to be feared the same lazy and slothful humour follows him mostly even to the tribunal of penance: And is there not then great danger of such a one's coming to it wholly indisposed? The case is but too clear: For since, of all the duties of a Christian, his receiving the sacrament is of the greatest importance, and requires a very serious preparation, what encouragement have we to hope this from one, who is ever inclined to consult his ease, and give way to the suggestions of sloth? Is there not, on the contrary, reason enough to apprehend such a one will be faulty either in the due examination of conscience, or the sorrow he ought
to

to have; since these are tasks which require a more serious application than a person, accustomed to indulge his sloth, will probably use to perform them as he ought.

However, it is here necessary to observe, that what has been said (particularly concerning the danger of abusing the sacraments) regards not persons of a *timorous* or *tender* conscience, as appears plainly from the character I have given of those who alone are concerned in it: For persons of a timorous conscience are always apt to over-do their duty, rather than fall short of it. Their chief fault is too much solicitude rather than neglect; and their predominant weakness is an immoderate fear, which is so apt to make them run into excesses on the *right side*, that they are in no danger of erring on the *left*: Nay, if there be any danger in their state, it consists in their being, for the most part, too stiff and positive in the unfavourable judgment they make of themselves, and not paying the submission they ought to their directors, who are better able to judge of their condition than they themselves. Because an *excessive fear* is no less apt to set things in a false light, and impose upon the judgment, than *presumption*: And therefore those, who are told by their directors that they are subject to this weakness, ought to be convinced that terrifying truths are not intended for them, but for those alone, who, though careless and slothful in performing all duties, yet live without fear, and are therefore in danger of going in the same slothful way, and good opinion of themselves, till death presents them before the tribunal of the great searcher of hearts, before whom *nothing is covered that shall not be revealed, nor hid, that shall not be known.* Matt. x. 26.

THE

THE TWELFTH ENTERTAINMENT.

CONCERNING THE ACCOUNT TO BE GIVEN OF
OTHER MEN'S SINS.

*Cleanse me from my hidden sins, O Lord; and
from the guilt of other men's sins deliver thy
servant. Pf. xviii. 13.*

THIS was the humble prayer of the *royal prophet*, who was solicitous to obtain God's pardon, not only for his own personal sins, but for those also to which he had been any ways accessary in others. And who is there amongst us, that does not stand in need of this mercy? Who dares confidently say his soul is clear, or that he has nothing to answer for his neighbour's sins? What parents, or heads of families, or persons in any other post of authority, and intrusted with the care of others, are sure they have not, either by words or actions, or at least by neglect, been the occasion of sin to those that are committed to their charge? Nay, is there any one that has the assurance to affirm, that even in the ordinary commerce of human life, and common conversation, he has always been so watchful over himself, as never to have prejudiced his neighbour's soul by discourse or example? I dare boldly call it a presumption in any man to make this positive judgment of himself.

However, since most Christians have but a very weak idea of this truth, and seem to be secure enough on that side, I shall, in this entertainment, lay before you the many ways there are of drawing on ourselves the guilt of other men's sins: Of which there will be a strict examination made, and for which we shall be accountable at the great day of assizes.

All

All sins of thought, as long as they are stifled within our own breasts, and are neither manifested by word or action, being incapable of influencing our neighbour, are purely personal, and consequently foreign to the subject of this discourse. But there is not any sin of the tongue, nor any sinful action, but if practised in company may, in some measure, be the occasion of sin to others, either by being an immediate inducement, or by preparing at least the remote dispositions to it. The reason is, because all sort of example being of its own nature an encouragement to imitation, as is evident from experience, it follows, that as good example is an inducement to virtue, so bad example is naturally an incentive to vice, and can never be wholly free from infection. And therefore as persons that carry an infectious distemper about them, are apt to communicate it to those they converse with, whether they design it or not; so all sinning in the presence of others is catching in some degree, whether it be designed as a snare, or done without any such intention.

Hence it is that those, who are remarkably given to any vice of the tongue, as *curfing and swearing, detraction, prophaneness, or immodest language*, or are subject to the sin of *drunkenness*, have something more to answer for than the bare guilt of these sins, considered nakedly in themselves. Because all sins of this sort, being committed in public, are by consequence generally attended with the additional guilt of scandal, in their being an encouragement to all that are present to commit the same. For men are naturally emboldened to venture at what they see others do before them. We contract a certain familiarity with sin by seeing it often committed: We are weaned by degrees from the

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horror we had to it. What startled us at first, becomes inoffensive by use, and when we are once reconciled to vice in others, we have but an easy step to make to it ourselves. So that whosoever has been much concerned in the fore-mentioned vices, or others that are public, can never be secure of not having a great deal to answer for on the score of his neighbour, though he never was guilty of expressly soliciting him to sin, or doing any thing with a premeditated design to draw him into it. Because he knows not what mischief his example alone may have done, how far it may have spread, or what impression it may have left behind.

However, this reason holds particularly, when the example is given by those that are in authority, or whose superiority of station in a family makes them remarkable. For then it carries a more powerful malignity, in not only being an encouragement to vice, but giving a sort of credit and reputation to it. Hence it is no wonder that where the heads of families are disorderly, the servants should affect, or at least not fear to be so too: Or that children who daily hear their parents curse and swear, or see them often in drink, should, as they grow up, inherit these vices of them. For considering how prone all mankind is to imitation, and particularly how apt all children are to imitate their parents, as being brought up from their cradles with a great esteem and respect for them, how is it possible but the example of parents should have the greatest influence imaginable upon them, either to good or evil.

This consideration ought to make all parents wary, even to a nicety, what they either say or do before their children; because whatever they say or do carries weight with it. And since the
tender

tender minds of children are very susceptible of impressions, and the first impressions are generally most lasting, especially such as have a corrupt nature to help them to sink the deeper, all parents that resolve to discharge their duty, and fully discharge the trust that is lodged in them, ought to be careful to set their children no other example, than what they may safely follow, nor let them be witness of any thing, but what may contribute to inspire them with a sense of piety and virtue; and so lead them insensibly into the way of God's commandments. For without this caution they can never be secure of their not having been instrumental to such miscarriages as may afterwards befall them; or that the ruin of their souls, if that should be their unhappy lot, be not laid at their doors.

But to return to my subject; besides this way of encouraging sin by example, I fear all those will scarce be found less criminal, who though they give no scandal in any part of their own lives, yet through neglect or sloth take no care to prevent the growth of sin in others under their charge. And here again, all parents will be found guilty, who either let their children grow up without providing them sufficient instruction, or through excessive fondness either wholly overlook their faults, or have not courage enough to correct those they observe in them.

2dly, All masters or mistresses of families, who either countenance or tolerate abuses and irregularities in their servants, which the authority they have over them obliges them to remedy by a due and seasonable method. So that the persons here mentioned, though they may be free from personal sins, and very edifying in their own lives, yet by being ill parents, or careless masters, may be found guilty in the sight of

God, of the sins of others, which by their watchfulness and care they might and ought to have prevented.

The severe punishment inflicted on the high priest *Heli*, is a terrible instance of this truth. For the scripture does not accuse him of any personal irregularity; but his children were guilty of very notorious ones, which gave great scandal. The father indeed chid them mildly for it; but out of fondness, natural to parents, had not the courage to chastise them as their crime deserved. Whereupon Almighty God first sent a prophet to denounce to him the judgments that should befall him and his whole family: and soon after revealed the same things to *Samuel*, saying to him, *Behold I will do a thing in Israel, at which both the ears of every one that heareth it shall tingle. In that day I will perform against Heli all the things which I have spoke concerning his house. When I begin I will make an end. For I have told him that I will judge his house for ever for iniquity, because he knew that his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not. And therefore I have sworn unto the house of Heli, that the iniquity of Heli's house shall not be purged with sacrifice, nor offering, for ever.* This was the sentence pronounced by God against *Heli* and his family; which was soon after executed with the utmost rigour, and ought to be a warning to all those who are in authority, not to draw upon themselves, by a criminal connivance or neglect, the sins of those whom God has committed to their charge.

But now, if even those, who but encourage sin by their example, or hinder it not when they ought, will be found guilty of their neighbour's miscarriages, what a dreadful load of other men's sins do they then heap upon themselves,

selves, who are not content to shew the way of iniquity, or stand still to see them run headlong into it, but even drag them forcibly to it by commanding, persuading, counselling, soliciting, threatening, or otherwise provoking them to it? These indeed are such professed agents and ministers of *Satan*, that it is not to be doubted, but as they now serve him in so eminent a post, so will they hereafter receive their reward accordingly. They are like those heads and ring-leaders of rebellion, who fight not only in person against their sovereign, but levy forces against him; and their sin, like the *Devil* mentioned by St. *Mark*, may properly be called *Legion*. But there being several degrees of this sin too foul to be mentioned, I shall only touch upon some few branches of it, of an inferior degree of malice; because these being comparatively less enormous, are slighted by many, and scarce reputed sins.

First, then, All those are here concerned, who in course maintain any principle or doctrine contrary to the doctrine of the gospel: Such as is, for example, the lawfulness of revenging an affront. Nor are they less guilty who applaud them that do it, running out at large in commendation of their bravery and courage; or villify those who decline it. For this is nothing less than preaching up vice to the company, and exhorting them to practise what is flatly condemned by the laws both of God and man.

2dly, They that put bad books into the hands, particularly of young persons, I mean books tending either to prophaneness, immodesty, or any other sort of immorality.

3dly, They who sow discord, and by carrying stories to and fro, either cause misunderstandings, or widen breaches already made. Per-

sons of this humour are mere firebrands in a family, the very bane of human society, and deserve to have a mark of infamy set upon them, that all may be upon their guard against them.

4thly, They are guilty, at least in some degree, who, by flattery and affected praises, contribute to inspire their neighbour with a vain conceit of himself, and thereby increase the principal distemper of human nature. For we all know that pride is the reigning disease of mankind; nay, the root of all other evils; and that every one brings but too large a share of it into the world. We also find sufficiently by experience, that flatteries and praises are the greatest fomenters of this vice. Now then, since charity obliges all men even to remedy, as far as in them lies, and much more not to augment their neighbour's evils, how comes it, that in this particular instance, the contrary is every where practised without scruple? We applaud, magnify, and extol him before his face, and think no harm is done, yet are all the while infusing a most dangerous poison into him, nourishing his natural pride, and working him up into an exorbitant opinion of himself. And is all this no sin? Truly, if prejudicing our neighbour in his body be a sin, I cannot well see how wilfully contributing to prejudice his soul should be an innocent thing.

5thly, and lastly, Those are undoubtedly guilty of a very grievous sin of scandal, who by repeating importunities press others to drink to excess, and when they have prevailed upon their weakness, triumph as if they returned loaden with spoils of a conquered foe. It is of these *Solomon* tells us, *that they are glad when they have done ill, and rejoice in the most wicked things.* But what

what a strange part is this for a Christian to act ! First to be the wilful author of his neighbour's sin, and then to sport with the mischief he has done ? Is sinning then a jesting matter ? Is murdering souls a trifle to sport with, and degrading men into beasts, a proper subject of merriment and laughter ? This is not only an affront to God, by defacing his sacred image, but looks like insulting over him, and adding contumely to impiety.

Besides, who sees not the ill consequence of making vice a matter of diversion and mirth ? For can any thing contribute more effectually to lessen the deformity and heinousness of it, than to see it played and jested with, as if it were nothing more than an ordinary pastime ? If any one should seriously maintain, that drunkenness is a becoming quality, his discourse would pass for a satire upon it. But to sport and laugh with it is to plead for it in earnest ; because there needs no more to recommend it, than to make it appear a harmless or indifferent thing : Now, whatever men make the subject of a jest, is supposed to be so.

Hence I cannot but accuse those of indiscretion, who when their friends have been disordered with drink, jest as familiarly with them upon that subject, as if they had only been concerned in some innocent frolic. Whereas sinning mortally is too serious a subject to droll upon, and ought either to be seriously reprov'd, or where that freedom is unseasonable, it is better to be silent than to prejudice the cause of virtue by lessening the deformity of vice, which jesting and laughing with it naturally tends to. In a word, it is equally dangerous jesting either with virtue or vice : For it does an injury to the

one, and a credit to the other, by putting them both upon the level with toys and trifles.

Now therefore to conclude, since there are so many ways of drawing on ourselves the guilt of other men's sins, every one has reason enough to live under a continual fear of appearing before that dreadful tribunal, where so severe an account will be demanded, not only of our own but our neighbour's transgressions. I own it is very painful to nature to be always in fear. But let nature be uneasy, she may comfort herself with considering that *working our salvation in fear and trembling*, is advised by St. Paul as the safest way we can walk in. And the reason is evident. *First*, Because the fear of God's judgment is a continual curb upon corrupt nature, and renders us watchful, not to say or do any thing that may hereafter rise in judgment against us. And, *2dly*, Because it is the mother of humility, and a sovereign preservative against those dangerous suggestions of vanity, which some may be exposed to on the score of their pretended innocence. Those I mean, who not being conscious of any considerable personal sins, which doubtless is a most signal blessing, are apt to grow too secure, and even presumptuous of God's favour; not reflecting that they are perhaps to be accountable for other men's actions as well as their own; and that being clear from any considerable personal sins, they know not how far they may be concerned in those of their neighbour.

For though perhaps they never have encouraged sin by their ill example, are they sure they have not done it by their connivance, silence, or neglect? Though they never pushed or dragged their neighbour to the precipice, have they always been watchful to draw him from it, when they could and ought to do it? Have they never flattered

tered his pride and vanity for private ends? Have they never encouraged detraction by shewing a satisfaction to hear it, nor broached discourses with design to have some one brought upon the stage? Finally, have they not, by their vain and worldly discourses, contributed to inspire their neighbour with a love of the world and its dangerous pleasures? Now, if they cannot with a full assurance plead not guilty to any of these articles, what have they else to do but humble themselves daily under the omnipotent hand of God, and, throwing themselves wholly upon his infinite mercies, beseeching him, with the *royal prophet*, not to charge them with the guilt of other men's sins? And less than this no Christian can do without danger of presumption.

But they who have been notoriously guilty of propagating vice in any kind whatsoever, whether by persuasion or example, have something else to do. For there is also a reparation and atonement due to their neighbour whom they have injured by their scandal; and the best reparation they can make, is to do what they can to become now as serviceable to virtue as they have once been to vice. And how must this be done but by being now as edifying in their lives, as they were scandalous before? by shewing upon all occasions their abhorrence to their former sins, and by promoting every where, both by discourse and example, particularly the virtues opposite to those vices for which they have formerly been most remarkable, and whereby they have chiefly prejudiced their neighbour. For by this method the satisfaction will bear some proportion to the injustice done. And they will have reason to hope that Almighty God, who is infinite in mercy as well as justice, seeing their earnest desire, and hearty endeavours to

make the best amends they can for what is past, and finding them as zealous now in his cause, as they were once enemies to it, will look upon them with compassion, and cancel the great debt they contracted, both by their own and neighbour's sins, and reverse the sentence he had decreed against them.

THE THIRTEENTH ENTERTAINMENT. OF HELL.

OF THE PAIN OF SENSE IN GENERAL.

Every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit shall be cut down and cast into the fire. Matt. iii. 10.

HAVING already gone through the most important truths relating to *death* and *judgment*, I shall now begin to speak of the punishments and rewards of the life to come. Concerning which I shall be careful not to advance any thing but what is either grounded upon the word of God, or taught by divines, or drawn from principles which seem to be beyond dispute. But I shall first premise a reflection, which appears necessary in relation to such revealed truths as are above our comprehension, and which, according to the elegant figure of *St. Paul*, we see but in part, and in a glass darkly, 1 Cor. xiii. 12. Amongst which are the two revealed truths concerning the punishments and rewards of the life to come.

Now in handling truths of this nature, it is impossible to carry our expressions up to what they really are. The very ablest pen or tongue can no more represent them, as they are in themselves, than the most skilful painter can set forth the vast and beautiful orb of the sun in its full natural proportion and lustre. For our
words

words can at best but keep pace with our thoughts, but never go beyond them. We cannot express more than we can conceive. And therefore, since the nature of those truths is above the reach of human understanding; since, as St. *Paul* tells us, they can only be conceived *in part, and as in a glass darkly*, it follows, that even when they are set forth to their greatest advantage, they are only expressed in the same dark and imperfect manner; and by consequence, whatever strength of words and ornaments of eloquence are employed to represent such truths, we must always form this judgment, that they are infinitely greater in themselves than they are represented: Because the ideas we have of them come undoubtedly very short of their real objects; and our expressions being but the painting of our ideas, and, as it were, second-hand copies of the objects themselves, must needs represent them at least as imperfectly as they are conceived in our thoughts.

This reflection therefore must be carried on through every part of the subject I am now entering upon. The word of God itself tells us of the joys of Heaven, *that the eye has not seen, neither has the ear heard, nor has it entered into the heart of man, what God has prepared for those that love him*. And the same must be said of the pains of hell, prepared for them that live and die in the state of sin. It is impossible to conceive, much less to express, either the one or the other. Our faith must supply the defect of our understanding, and convince us, that as no joy or pleasure of this world can bear any proportion to that of the blessed souls in Heaven, so the acutest pains that ever were or can be endured in this life, are but imaginary ones, and
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not worth speaking of, if compared with the torments of the damned in hell.

I shall begin with these according to the method of spiritual writers, who usually consider them under two general heads, called by divines the *pain of sense*, and the *pain of loss*. Under the first head are contained all evils that affect the senses; and under the second all interior pains of the soul caused by *grief, anguish, despair, shame, hatred, envy*, and the *violent cravings of passions* never to be satisfied. I shall now speak only of the *pain of sense* in general; and since a person dying in the state of sin is from that very instant condemned to *hell-fire*, which causes the most grievous pain of that sort, I shall endeavour to shew that a damned soul suffers the pain of sense independently of the reunion of the body; and is, by consequence, the fuel of *hell-fire*, as well before as after the general resurrection; which shall be the subject of this entertainment.

According to the vulgar way of thinking, we are apt to fancy that we should easily form some idea of the *pain of sense*, if the soul immediately after death were again united to the body. But we have a difficulty to conceive how this sort of pain is consistent with the state of separation. For the pain of sense is no other, than that which we suffer by all or some one of our five senses; and how can the soul be capable of sensation, when she is stript of all the natural organs of her senses? Can she see without eyes, hear without ears, feel without flesh and blood, and so forth? But this difficulty is chiefly owing to a want of true ideas of the different natures of the soul and body, the two parts whereof man is composed.

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First, then, As to the body, we must consider, that this part of man, even whilst it is informed and animated by the soul, is nothing but *mere matter*, as having been originally formed of earth; and mere matter can never be a principle of *life* any more than a log of wood, nor by consequence of *sensation*. But the soul is a spiritual substance, created immediately by the hand of God, and is itself the sole principle both of *sensation* and *reason*. Hence both spiritual and scholastic writers conceive two different parts in the soul; one of which they call the *inferior* or *sensitive* part; the other the *superior* or *rational* part; which is a manifest proof of their attributing *sensation* as well as *reasoning* to the soul alone. However, their meaning is not that there are two parts really distinct in the soul, but only two different denominations attributed to the same spiritual substance, as she is the root or principle both of *sensitive* and *intellectual* operations, in whatever state she be, and whether she acts in conjunction with or separately from the body.

It is true, Almighty God has ordered human nature so, that the soul, during her state of union in this life, shall not be capable of any exercise either of her intellectual or sensitive faculties, without the ministry of the body: so that as a man can neither think nor reason without brains, so neither can she *see*, nor *hear*, nor *feel*, nor *taste*, nor *smell*, without the respective *organs* made by the author of nature to be subservient to these *sensitive* operations.

But though the soul be thus made to depend upon the ministry of the body, and is without it unable in this world to exert herself in any functions of life, whether *sensation* or *reason*, yet this is but an accidental condition of her present state, but no part of her essence. For the
soul

soul is essentially a spiritual substance, unalterable in her nature, and the several parts of the body are but her tools and instruments to work with in this life. When that is ended, she changes not her essence, but her state; as a man who throws off his cloaths or shackles, is the same human nature he was before. And therefore as the soul, whilst united to the body, is by her essence and nature the sole principle, not only of *intellectual* but of all *vital* and *sensitive* operations; since the body only furnishes the material organs adapted to her present state of conjunction with it; it follows, that after their separation, whilst the body, according to its corruptible nature, returns to earth, the soul cannot but continue to be what she is by essence, the same source and principle both of *reason* and *sensation*.

This is manifest as to the *intellectual* part of the soul, since both philosophers and divines agree, that her intellectual powers act with much greater strength and vivacity in her state of separation, than they can possibly do under the clog and incumbrances of the body. The same is no less evident as to the sense of *feeling*. For no man of sound principles doubts, but that a damned soul is tormented by *hell-fire* from the very instant of her condemnation; and it is manifested from the words of the *rich glutton* in hell. But if the soul separated from the body had no sense of *feeling*, hell-fire could not torment her. For let it be ever so violent or active in its nature, it cannot be a cause of pain, unless it acts upon a subject that can feel it: And, therefore, since there is no reason to doubt, but that the soul separated from the body had no sense of *feeling*, there seems to be as little reason to doubt, but that sensitive powers, namely,

ly, those of *hearing, seeing, smelling, and tasting*, are likewise inseparable from her essence; though their respective functions be doubtless performed after a different manner, according to the difference of her immaterial and incorruptible state, into which she enters immediately after her dissolution.

So that if any one asks me, how the soul can *see* without *eyes*, or *hear* without *ears*, and of the rest; I answer him, by asking likewise, how she can *think, understand, and reason*, without brains? since there appears no greater difficulty in the one than in the other. In effect, all the difficulty that appears, arises wholly from an error of imagination in attributing that to the body, which really belongs to the soul, when they are united together. For we imagine the organs of the senses to be the senses themselves, which I conceive to be a great mistake. The organs of sensation are indeed in the body, but the sensation itself is in the soul. And though, according to the vulgar way of speaking, we say that the eyes see, and the ears hear, yet the *eyes* and *ears* are no more the senses of *seeing* and *hearing*, than the windows, through which the light passes, are the light itself; for the true meaning of it is no other, than that the ideas of the respective objects of *sight* and *hearing* are conveyed to the soul through the eyes and ears, as the light of the sun is conveyed to us through the windows.

It is true indeed, that according to the condition of the soul in this life, material objects cannot make impressions upon us, nor affect us either with pain or pleasure, otherwise than by making their way to the soul by the ministry of the corporeal organs: But the radical source itself both of seeing, hearing, and other sensations,
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which are all operations of life, is inherent in the soul alone, is a part of her very substance, and so imbibed in her nature as to be inseparable from it.

This is not all; but we must further observe, that the soul, whilst she is united to, and acts in conjunction with the body, is by all spiritual writers considered as under a state of *confinement*. The body is usually called her *prison*, and all those numberless organical parts, on which she depends, both in her sensitive and intellectual capacity, are to be considered no otherwise than as so many *chains* or *shackles*, which cramp her natural powers, and hinder them from exerting themselves with their full vivacity and strength. They are, indeed, of necessary use with relation to her present state; but it is like the use of crutches to a cripple. For the soul united to the body cannot indeed move or act without them; as a cripple, during his state of infirmity, cannot walk without crutches. But her state of union is a state of weakness, and as long as it lasts, all the motions and operations of the soul are lame, weak, and languid. But as a cripple restored to the natural use of his limbs, moves with much greater strength and swiftness than whilst he is confined to crutches; so when the soul is delivered by death from the chains and incumbrance of the body, all her powers are, as it were, set at liberty: She acts without restraint, and exerts herself with the utmost extent of her natural force. Her understanding is enlarged, to give her a full knowledge of her eternal state, and of every thing that contributes to render it happy or unhappy. All her ideas are clear and distinct: because the objects that excite them meet with no interpositions of matter to clog or weaken the impressions they make upon her.

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They act upon her immediately, without being obliged to force their way through flesh and blood to come at her ; so that all her sensations and movements are attended with an acuteness and violence, far superior to what she can have in this world ; and (if I may be allowed to make use of a familiar comparison) we may truly say, that as blows are more sensible and painful to a naked body, than to one covered with thick cloaths, so the pains of a soul stripped naked of the body, are infinitely more acute and violent than any she can here endure, under the gross and material cover of flesh and blood.

From these reflections it follows, that by a wonderful providential disposition of divine justice, every part or faculty of the soul will, even in her state of separation, be a distinct source of some accidental increase of punishment or reward, according as it has been a source of virtuous or sinful actions in this life ; and all her sensitive, as well as intellectual powers, will have their share of torment or pleasure exactly proportioned to the sins or virtues, of which they were made instruments upon earth.

I will not indeed pretend to explain either the particular manner, how the soul exerts her sensitive powers in her state of separation, or the nature of the objects that work upon her, or the manner how they affect her either with pain or pleasure. For though the knowledge of these things might serve to gratify our curiosity, they are not necessary for our instruction, or clearer information of the truth ; it suffices, in this as well as many other cases, to know that it is a truth, grounded upon solid principles of reason. But the *how*, or manner of it, is a subject of mere barren speculation, and nothing to the main purpose : It suffices, for example, to be convinced,

convinced, that a damned soul separated from the body is tormented by hell-fire, and that by consequence she feels the violence and activity of the flames that torment her; but as to the nature of hell-fire, as whether it be true elemental fire, or of a different sort from what we know in this world; or as to the manner how it acts upon a spiritual substance, or how a soul unorganized can be a proper fuel for it; these are mere amusements of human curiosity, and indeed above the reach of our understanding.

Nay, we are almost as much in the dark concerning the manner how we *see*, *hear* or *feel* in this life; for the very wisest men differ in their opinions about it: Some say, we *see* by the emission of rays from the eyes; others explain it by the reception of species from the objects: and there is the same uncertainty about the manner of sensation of all the other senses: and indeed all we are sure of is, that we see with our eyes, hear with our ears, and so of the rest. And therefore, as it would be a madness to doubt of it, because we know not how to explain it, so none but madmen can doubt of hell-fire, or the grievousness of the torment it causes in damned souls, because we cannot comprehend the *how*, or manner of it. I heartily pray God, we may never be made sensible of it by an experimental knowledge.

But what I have said concerning the nature of man's soul, seems to amount to a convincing proof that the *pain of sense* in a damned soul is the same in both her states after this life; that is, as well before as after the re-union of the body; and this I find conformable to the sentiment of all spiritual writers upon this subject; who in explaining the pain of sense, never give the

the least hint, as if the proper pain of any of the senses were suspended to the general resurrection; on the contrary, their usual method is to be very particular in specifying all the different torments of the five senses, and appropriating to each one a punishment suitable to the nature of the sins, whereof it has been an instrument in this life; and this without mentioning any difference between her state of separation from, or re-union to the body, or exempting a damned soul from any sensible pain in one state, with which she is to be tormented in the other.

In effect, whoever allows the soul to have a sense of feeling in her state of separation, must allow her all her other senses, since there is the same reason for all as for one: And therefore since it is above all question, that one part of her pain of sense, *viz.* her burning in hell commences from the very instant of her condemnation; there is likewise no reason to doubt but that all the other senses have their share of torment assigned them from the very same moment. And this seems also to be most conformable to that exact equality of justice, which God exercises in the other world.

For, the very moment that a person expires, he ceases to be in a state of meriting or demeriting; that is, from that moment he cannot do any thing to deserve the least increase or diminution either of punishment or reward: That very moment also his sentence is pronounced, which being infinitely just, must by consequence be exactly proportioned to the number and quality of all his past sins or virtues; allowing likewise for all their consequences, of which God has a perfect knowledge. If therefore the punishment of a person condemned to hell-

hell-fire were augmented after the general resurrection, by some additional pain of sense, it would follow, that it would then either exceed the measure of his past sins, or not come fully up to it in the whole interval betwixt his death and the great day of general judgment. And since this seems to be inconsistent with the most obvious notion of an infinite justice, we must conclude, that the *pain of sense*, as well as that of *loss*, is in its full measure allotted to every damned soul at her very first plunge into hell-fire; and that, though after the re-union of the body, the manner of it may be different (concerning which we are wholly in the dark) the substance and violence of her pains are as fixed and unchangeable as her eternal state.

Let us beseech Almighty God to grant us the spirit of true penance in this life, particularly in the mortification of our senses. The dangerous liberties and unlawful pleasures we allow them now, will cost us very dear hereafter: But if we labour to subdue them in this life; if we subject them to the government of reason, and make them subservient to virtue, they will also be partakers of the incomprehensible joys prepared for us in the life to come.

THE FOURTEENTH ENTERTAINMENT.

A PARTICULAR ACCOUNT OF THE PAIN OF SENSE.

Cast him into outer darkness: There shall be weeping, and gnashing of teeth. Matt. xxii. 13.

IN my last discourse I entertained you with some general considerations relating to the *pain of sense*; I shall now proceed to give you a
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more particular account of it ; and this shall be the subject of this entertainment.

That part of the punishment of the damned, which is called the *pain of sense*, is principally called by the nature of the *place*, where the damned souls are imprisoned, and the unquenchable *flames* to which they are condemned.

As to the *place* assigned them for their eternal abode, which we call *hell*, it is unquestionably under ground, and very probably in the very centre or bowels of the earth. St. *John*, in his *Revelations*, calls it the *Lake of God's Wrath*. The prophet *Isaiah* calls it *Tophet*, and gives this frightful description of it. *From eternity*, says he, *is Tophet prepared by the King*, (meaning Almighty God) *he has made it deep and large : The pile thereof is fire and much wood. The breath of the Lord, like a stream of brimstone, doth kindle it. And holy Job* calls it *a land of darkness covered with the gloomy shade of death, where no order, but eternal horror and confusion dwelleth.*

Now these descriptions are mostly suitable to the nature of a subterraneous place, or prison under ground. *Deepness* denotes its situation ; and *darkness*, *confusion*, and *horror* are the natural consequences of it. There are, besides, many other expressions in holy writ, which favour this belief ; as that of the Psalmist, *Let them descend alive into hell*. And it is related of the rich glutton, *that he died, and was buried in hell* : Which expressions, *viz.* *descending into*, and being *buried in hell*, naturally form in us an idea of a place beneath the surface of the earth, and far distant from the seat of bliss.

Of which we have still a farther insinuation in the words of our *creed*, though the *hell* there spoken of be very different from that of the damned : The words I mean are these : *He descended into Hell : The third day rose again, ascend-*
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ed into Heaven, &c. For a person cannot properly be said to *descend*, but from a higher place to a lower ; nor to *ascend*, but from a lower place to one respectively higher : So that the surface of the earth is here represented as in a middle situation between the region of darkness below, and the mansions of eternal light above : And since we cannot doubt but these are full as opposite in their situation, as nature, we may confidently say, that the Heaven of the blessed souls is the very highest, and the hell of the damned the very lowest part of the whole creation : And that as the elevation of the one will give an increase of accidental glory to the elect, so will the lowness of the other cause an addition of torment and confusion in the reprobate.

But the reason, whence it chiefly appears, that the *hell of the damned* is not only a place under ground, but in the very lowest caverns of the earth, is, because the *hell*, into which *Christ* descended, was a subterraneous place, as I have already remarked ; and according to these words of the apostle, *For who is he who ascended, but he who descended first into the lower parts of the earth ?* And yet the hell of the damned is still much lower than this, as appears from the history or parable of the *rich glutton*, who demanding of *Abraham* a drop of water to cool his tongue, was answered by him, that there was a great gulph or space betwixt them, which debarred the damned from receiving, and him from sending any comfort, from the place where he and *Lazarus* made their abode ; which doubtless was the hell or *prison* of the saints of the old law, into which our Saviour *Christ* descended, in order to release those holy captives whom he had ransomed with his sacred blood, of which the unhappy glutton could receive no benefit ;

benefit; because *in hell* (namely, *the hell of the damned*) there is *no redemption*.

If you ask how man's soul, which is a spiritual substance, can be confined to, or imprisoned in a material place? I answer, that there is no more difficulty to conceive the soul imprisoned in a *material place*, than to conceive her imprisoned in a *material body*. We all know that the body is the *prison* of the soul in this life: And the body is originally but earth turned into flesh, which after death returns into earth. So that a soul condemned to Hell is but removed from one earthly prison to another; that is, from a prison above ground, where goods and evils, joys and sorrows, pleasures and pains, are continually interwoven, to one under ground, where a dreadful aggregation of all imaginable evils is to be her everlasting portion.

For in the prison of this world she sees the beautiful light of the sun, is refreshed by the air, and enjoys the comfort of the other elements: Her senses are entertained with many agreeable objects, her sorrows are alleviated by the company of friends, her cares diverted by a great variety of amusements, and the repose of night not only suspends her labours, but supplies her with new strength to support them. But in the prison of the other world every thing contributes to torment her: The very depth and darkness of the place affects her with horror. She has all the pain of a person buried alive, and stifled under the weight of the earth, without the power of dying; the extremities both of heat and cold, the apparitions of frightful spectres, the gnawings of serpents and other venomous creatures, according to St. *Austin*; finally, the confused noise of curses and blasphemies, howlings and lamentations, are the everlasting

lasting entertainment of her senses; without the least interval of repose, without a friend to comfort her, or any change of objects to divert her from her torments.

So that we must conceive the Hell of the damned to be a dreadful dungeon, separated from all light and air by the whole thickness of the earth, which immures it, as it were, on every part: A dungeon filled with horror, filth, and noisome stench, and impenetrable to all relief. In a word, a dungeon, where those unfortunate criminals are to be kept prisoners for all eternity; where they will be everlasting objects of God's wrath, the eternal victims of his justice, the hatred and aversion of saints and angels, and the scorn and derision of their implacable tormenters.

But of all the pains of sense, that which is caused by hell-fire is the most grievous; and the truth of it is so authentically attested in holy writ, that no man of sound principles can doubt of it. *Fire and brimstone* (says the royal prophet) *shall be a part of their cup. Their worm* (says Isaiah) *shall never die, and their fire shall never be quenched: Whoever* (says St. John, in his Revelations) *was not found written in the book of life, was thrown into a pool of fire: And the holy Baptist* made use of no other argument, to induce his auditors to embrace the baptism of penance he preached. *The axe* (says he) *is already laid to the root: Therefore every tree that brings not forth good fruit shall be cut down, and cast into the fire. He will gather* (speaking of our Saviour) *his wheat into his granary, but he will burn the chaff with unquenchable fire.* All which is confirmed by Christ himself, saying, that in the last day he will pronounce this terrible sentence against the reprobate, *Go ye accursed into everlasting*

ing fire, which is prepared for the Devil and his angels.

Can any thing be clearer and stronger than these expressions of holy writ? which therefore the fathers, and other spiritual writers, ever understood in their obvious and literal sense; and they always took care to inculcate, that the fire prepared for sinners is a true and real fire; which they therefore call the chief minister of God's wrath, the avenger of his cause, the principal agent, instrument, and executioner of the divine justice. And St. *Austin* sticks not to say, that the fire of this world, compared to that of Hell, is no more than a *painted fire*.

Now of all sensible pains, that which is caused by fire, even in this world, is generally esteemed one of the most violent and insupportable. All men have a strong and lively apprehension of it: Insomuch that there is scarce any death we naturally dread more than to be burnt alive, especially by a slow fire; which therefore never is inflicted but for the most enormous crimes, or by tyrants who have lost all sense of humanity. Would any one here present have the courage to hold his hand for one half hour upon a burning coal, though he were to gain a kingdom by it? I dare say there is not any one, though ever so poor, but would rather chuse to continue what he is, than purchase a change of condition at so dear a rate. And therefore we justly admire the heroic virtue of St. *Lawrence*, who whilst he lay broiling on a gridiron, rejoiced in his torments, and seemed insensible of the pain he endured. But nature had no share in this action, and would doubtless have sunk under the excessive violence of the pain, had not the invincible power of divine grace rendered him victorious over it.

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If then the fire, even of this world, causes a pain so grievous and intolerable, that no man would, upon any worldly consideration, endure the violence of it for any space of time, how shall we find words to express the grievousness of the pain which the damned endure amidst the scorching flames of hell! Since all spiritual writers affirm positively, that the violence and activity of hell-fire surpasses beyond all imagination that of any fire in this world! Truly, we may say without exaggeration, that even the *Babylonian Furnace*, though kindled seven times more than usually, was rather a refreshing gale than burning fire, if compared with the flames of Hell; and that St. *Lawrence's* gridiron would be a bed of roses to a damned soul.

The reason of this terrible difference is partly the nature of hell-fire itself, considered as an instrument of divine justice, and partly the nature or condition of the subject upon which it acts. As to the first, *viz.* the nature of hell-fire considered as an *instrument of divine justice*, we must observe, that whereas fire in this world was principally ordained by God, to *comfort, warm, and refresh*; hell-fire was on the contrary kindled by him for no other use than to *burn and torment*. And since there is not any part of the whole creation, that comes within our knowledge, but is by his infinite wisdom perfectly adapted to the peculiar use for which it is ordained, and endowed with a nature suitable to the part it has to act, in serving the designs of the Creator, we have reason to conclude, that the same infinite wisdom has also given to hell-fire such a nature and qualities, as fully answer the ends for which they are made; which being no other than to punish and torment the wicked with the utmost rigour, it is not to be questioned

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ed but Almighty God has communicated to it an impetuosity and violence, which surpasses every thing in this world, and is most lively expressed by the prophet *Isaiah*, saying, that hell-fire is blown upon and kindled by the breath of the Lord. To which St. *Austin* likewise alludes, when he says, that hell-fire burns marvellously but truly, *miris sed veris modis*.

God is indeed marvellous in all his works. But we may truly say, that of all his works, none appear more wonderful than his boundless liberality in Heaven, and the rigour of his justice in Hell. In Heaven he rewards like a God, and in Hell he punishes like a God. In Heaven he bestows blessings without measure, and in Hell he inflicts torments without mercy. His infinite wisdom and power are employed in Heaven to make the blessed souls compleatly happy, in all the demonstrations of his infinite goodness, and they are no less employed in Hell to make the damned souls smart under the rigour of his justice. And whereas all God's works in this world are a mixture of *justice* and *mercy*, in the life to come, they are all pure justice in relation to the reprobate: For in this life, indeed, when he chastises, he does it with the tenderness of a loving father: but in the life to come he punishes the reprobate like an irreconcilable enemy that takes revenge, or like a judge that treats a criminal according to the rigour of the law; which made holy *Job*, though his sufferings were so great, that he seemed utterly abandoned by God, express his condition by only saying, that *the hand of the Lord had touched him*, because the very severest sufferings in this world are but, as it were, some *gentle touches* of the hand of God; whereas he makes the reprobate in Hell feel the whole weight of

his terrible hand, giving his wrath full scope, and pouring forth his indignation upon them like an impetuous torrent. So that we may consider hell-fire as a dreadful instrument of execution, in the hands of an incensed and implacable God, revenging himself with it, according to the full impetuosity and violence of its nature.

But the second reason of the excessive torment it causes, is the nature or quality of the subject upon which it acts. For, in the first place, there is nothing in the damned that can any way resist or weaken its activity: And therefore, the word of God compares them to *dry wood, stubble, or straw*; because fire meets with little or no resistance in things of this nature; as is evident from experience. Now it is certain, that the less the resistance is of the subject, to which fire is applied, the greater is the impetuosity and violence, with which it acts upon it; and consequently where there is no resistance at all, it acts upon it with its full force.

But the incorruptibleness of the damned is another frightful circumstance, which may help to give us some idea of the excessive violence of their torments. For in this world, all manner of pain is limited by the mortality and weakness of our bodies; because whenever any pain exceeds a certain degree or measure of violence, beyond what nature can bear, it utterly destroys us. But in Hell, things are not so; because the most excessive torments can neither destroy nor alter the subject upon which hell-fire acts. And therefore, as the pains of the damned will be without end, because the subject will never be destroyed, so will they also be without diminution or abatement, because the incorruptibleness of their state renders them incapable of change. So that after millions of millions of years passed

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in those fiery dungeons, and furnaces of unquenchable flames, the damned will have as quick and feeling sense of the fire, as they had the very first moment. In a word, all their torments, though violent beyond expression or imagination, will continue in their full degree of violence as long as hell-fire shall last, which will be for all eternity; ever burning without consuming, ever tormenting without altering or destroying any part of the miserable fuel upon which it acts.

I need not add any more, but leave every one to reflect, whether, considering the continual uncertainty of human life, we act not like madmen if we continue for any time in a state, from which, if death carries us to the other world, we are sure to pass to the dreadful torments I have described. Let us beseech Almighty God, to preserve us from this blindness, and give us grace to live so, that a happy eternity may be our reward.

THE FIFTEENTH ENTERTAINMENT.

OF THE PAIN OF LOSS.

Their worm dieth not, and their fire is not quenched.

Mark ix. 43.

BY the *worm*, which *dieth not*, is meant the everlasting and gnawing of conscience, and the anguish and despair of a damned soul, caused by the unhappy state into which she is fallen. For the better understanding whereof, we must consider that a man's soul is created to be happy. And since all creatures have a natural tendency to the end for which they are created, it follows that a general inclination to happiness is so imbibed in the nature of the soul, whatever state

she be in, that it is inseparable from it. In effect, the principal view men have in all the hurry and business of life, is no other than to make themselves as happy as they can, and whether honour, interest, or pleasure be the immediate object of their pursuits, happiness is the principal and ultimate end they aim at.

This inclination therefore, being inseparable from the very nature and essence of man's soul, not only follows her to the other world, but by her being then disengaged from the incumbrance of flesh and blood, becomes far more violent and craving: And by consequence, if a soul at her separation from the body, finds herself utterly deprived of the happiness after which she thirsts, the same inclination, which if gratified in the possession of an infinite good, would have rendered her infinitely happy, renders her infinitely miserable in the loss of it, and becomes a perpetual food of the *worm, which dieth not*; I mean, of that terrible part of her punishment, which divines call the pain of *loss*, and which I intend to explain in this entertainment.

Though the picture I have hitherto drawn of Hell be very frightful, it represents but one-half, and the milder part of the punishment of a damned soul; since divines generally agree, that the pain of *loss* is far more grievous than that of *sense*. This pain consists principally in the violent impressions of grief, made upon the soul for the loss of Heaven, and the unhappy state into which she has fallen. Now, whoever has at any time been under any great oppression and load of grief, will at least be sensible, that the pain of the mind is a very grievous torment, and suffices alone to render a person unhappy, though the body be perfectly at ease. So that there is this great difference between the sufferings of the
mind,

mind, and those of the body, that though the body be ever so much afflicted, a chearful and easy mind gives it relief. But a heart oppressed with grief feels the whole weight of its affliction, which, even in this world, where the objects that excite it are usually inconsiderable in themselves, becomes notwithstanding many times so heavy and insupportable, that many have laid violent hands on themselves to be delivered from it.

But the strongest proof that can be given of the violent pain, which grief alone can cause in the soul, is our Saviour's agony in the garden of *Gethsemani*; where he suffered himself to be seized with the heaviest load of grief, that ever fell upon any mortal man : Infomuch that many writers are of opinion, that it was the most painful part of all his sufferings; and Christ himself made this declaration of it, *that his soul was sorrowful even unto death* : That is, the grief that oppressed his heart was so great, that had he not miraculously preserved himself for the death of the cross, nature could not have subsisted under the weight of it. But though he had not expressed it in words, the extraordinary effect it wrought upon his sacred body, by throwing him into a sweat of blood, would have been a convincing proof of the violence of his pain.

I have produced this, only as an instance to convince us, that the interior pain of the soul, in which the senses have no share, may be a very grievous suffering : It is true indeed, there never was, nor ever can be any grief in this world, equal to what our Saviour suffered ; because the ideas that excited it were infinitely clearer and stronger, than any other mortal man is capable of. But there is a large difference between what a man is capable in this life, and

the grief of a damned soul; whereof there appear three principal roots or causes. *First*, the unmixed nature of the afflicting objects, which excite and nourish the passions of a damned soul. *2dly*, the clear ideas she has of those afflicting objects. And, *3dly*, the unchangeableness of her nature, when she enters into her eternal state. I shall touch briefly upon each.

First then, the objects, that occasion her grief in this life, are either inconsiderable trifles, or imaginary evils, or if real ones, are never without some mixture of comfort, and may be regarded on their favourable side: For there is scarce a temporal evil, but is counter-balanced by some good, to support an afflicted mind: If we lose one friend, others remain to make up the loss in some measure. If we be hated by some, a great number have a kindness, or at least an indifference for us: When one part of the body is in pain, the rest may be at ease; and so it is proportionably in all the sufferings of this life: No man's case is so utterly destitute and forlorn, as to be under a total privation of all comfort to alleviate his grief.

But matters are not so in the other world. The loss of Heaven, in regard of a damned soul, is an infinite and universal loss: A loss, which excludes all mixture of good, and comprehends an aggregation of all evils. For a damned soul is deprived of every thing she desires, and condemned to every thing she abhors. She is tormented in all her powers and senses. She is hated by all, and pitied by none; hated not only by God and all his saints and angels, but even by those who are to be the everlasting companions of her torments. So that, what way soever she turns herself, she sees no object before her but what is a real and substantial evil:

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No object but what is an everlasting source of pain: Finally, no object but what contributes to heighten her grief.

But the clear and full knowledge which a soul separated from the body, has of all those afflicting objects, is a second terrible circumstance, which raises her grief, and other painful passions to the highest pitch of violence: The body in this world is as a dead weight upon the soul; all her ideas of things, both temporal and eternal, are extremely weakened and obscured by it; and the extent of her understanding is reduced within a very narrow compass, as we plainly experience, in this life. But she is no sooner disengaged from the clog and incumbrance of the body, but the dark mist that huts before her is dissipated in a moment. She is like a person starting out of a profound sleep: Her understanding is enlarged to a prodigious degree; and her ideas depending now no more on a deluded imagination, or the deceitful information of sensitive organs, are all clear and distinct, in relation to every thing that contributes to her happiness or torment. And what a dreadful load of grief will this cast upon a reprobate soul, when all the circumstances of her unhappy state, all the causes of it, which depended upon her own free will, and irreparable consequences that attend it, are all clearly represented before her eyes.

The force of this consequence will appear evident, if we consider that the passion of grief, and other painful passions, are all but so many violent movements and agitations in the soul, excited by the ideas of such objects as are disagreeable to us. For as we can neither *love* nor *desire* any thing, but as we conceive it to be some *good*, so can we neither *hate* nor *fear* any thing,

thing, nor *grieve* for it, unless we regard it as an *evil*. And, by consequence, the clearer our ideas are of the object which excite our passions, the more violent are the movements or agitations, which they cause in the soul: As, on the contrary, weak ideas, even of objects of the most weighty consequence, make but weak impressions on the soul: as will appear beyond dispute from this single instance.

If we had a clear idea in this world, of the inestimable value of *sanctifying grace*, our loss of it by any mortal sin would afflict us in so violent a manner, that we should certainly die with grief: Nature would be unable to subsist under the weight of it. In like manner, if we had a clear idea of *heavenly beatitude*, we should be inconsolable in being separated from it, even for one single moment; nothing in this world would have any power to affect us with pleasure, nor yield us any manner of satisfaction. But it is the incumbrance of corruptible flesh and blood, that weakens and obscures our ideas of spiritual things; and the weakness of our ideas renders us so stupid, that neither the loss of an inestimable good, nor our banishment in this vale of tears, affects us with any sensible grief; and we are even forced to have recourse to the help of natural means, as reading and meditating upon certain truths, to work ourselves up to a tolerable sense of what would otherwise overwhelm us with anguish, if we had a true and clear idea of the unhappiness of our state. So that it is not the nature of the objects only, though ever so afflicting in themselves, but chiefly the light in which they are represented, that excites our grief. But when both are joined together, and the most afflicting objects are presented to us, in the strongest and clearest light

light that is possible, the grief they cause must needs be violent and painful beyond imagination.

Now this will help to lead us to some notion of that violent grief of a damned soul, which we call the *pain of loss*. We must therefore consider, that the soul of a sinner dying in the state of mortal sin, is no sooner separated from the body, but has a full and clear idea of the dignity of her nature, of the infinite happiness for which she was created, and the emptiness of those things, for love of which she has forfeited her title to it. She knows then, clearly, what it is to be made in the image and likeness of God; how great and noble the character of a Christian is, and to what degree she has dishonoured that character, and debased herself by the actions of her life past. She knows then, clearly, that nothing less than the possession of an infinite good can make her happy; that she had once as good a title to it as any saint in Heaven; that it depended upon her own free will to secure it for ever; that she had forfeited it for mere trifles, for things of no value, and that the loss is utterly irreparable. At the same time, she has the most violent inclination in her nature to be happy, but sees herself reduced to a state in every circumstance diametrically opposite to it.

Oh! what a dreadful load of *grief* and *anguish*, what *shame* and *confusion*, what *rage* and *despair* must all these afflicting ideas cause in an unfortunate soul, especially when they carry with them a conviction, that leaves no room for any palliation or excuse! *Grief* and *anguish*, for the loss of an infinite happiness: *Shame*, for having lost it by her own fault, when she might have secured it with the greatest ease: *Confusion*, for having lost it for pleasures beneath the dignity of her nature: And, finally, *rage* and *despair*,

to see herself justly doomed to endless and unspeakable torments, without the least hope of ever receiving any comfort or mitigation of her pains; because the incorruptibility of her nature, and unchangeableness of her state, render her utterly incapable of it, and adds the weight of *eternity* to every part and circumstance of her unhappy condition.

This leads me to the third remarkable difference, relating to the nature of grief in this world, and that of a soul suffering independently of the body. For the condition of a soul confined to the body, renders her subject to many natural necessities, without which life cannot subsist; we must eat, and drink, and sleep, to support it. Besides, a great part of our time is divided between the cares, employments, and amusements, incident to every state; and all these things contribute to divert the soul from attending to the object which excites and nourishes her grief; because they naturally introduce many new ideas, either of agreeable or indifferent objects, which interrupt her melancholy thoughts from time to time; and though they return again, they seldom represent the afflicting objects in the same disagreeable light, and, by consequence, make a weaker impression than they did at first; which also wears off gradually with the frequency of interruptions. And thus it is, that time seldom fails to be a cure even for the most obstinate grief in this life.

But things are quite otherwise in the life to come: for a soul separated from the body is no longer subject to any of its natural necessities, nor diverted from one thought to another by variety of objects. Hence the thoughts or ideas which a damned soul has in the moment of her condemnation, can never be changed nor interrupted;

rupted; because there is nothing either within her or about her, that can occasion any such change or interruption of thoughts, nor by consequence represent things to her in a different light, at one time, from what they appear to her at another: No, Christians, the ideas of a damned soul are always equally clear, equally strong, equally convincing; and what she thinks once, she never ceases to think of. The rigour, justice, and eternity of her pains are always present to her thoughts, and always in the manner as at the moment of her separation from the body. And, by consequence, the impressions of grief, which those frightful ideas of her having lost Heaven, and lost it by her own free will, and lost it without remedy; the impressions, I say, which they make upon her in the first moment of her entrance into hell, must of necessity continue in the same degree of violence for all eternity.

Now, what has been said concerning the passion of grief, must be applied to all the other passions of an unfortunate soul: I mean, her *shame, rage, despair, envy, hatred*, and the like. For, as the objects which excite and nourish these passions, always are, and always appear the same, so the several impressions, movements and agitations, which they produce, must likewise be the same for ever; as is farther confirmed from this clear reason. For if a damned soul could change her ideas, or pass from one object to another, her condition would be sometimes more, sometimes less painful, according to the nature of the objects that should work upon her. But since she is always equally criminal, the law of justice seems to demand, that she be always equally punished.

Oh!

Oh! what a deplorable state is it, to be for all eternity in the power of the most cruel and merciless tyrants! to be for ever oppressed with unspeakable grief, tortured with rage and despair, and burning with desires which will never be gratified! Yet this is the case of every damned soul, in proportion to the measure of sins committed in this life. For as every mortal sin plunges a soul deeper into hell-fire, and removes her farther from the possession of God, so it heaps upon her an additional increase of *grief, shame, and despair*; and the more grievous her torments are, the more she *envies* the happiness of the saints, and *bates* the infinite justice of God, which inflicts them upon her.

Now then, let us take a short review of all the circumstances of the unhappy state I have described. Let us consider a spiritual and immortal soul, noble in her nature, and little inferior to angels: A soul, created to enjoy a crown of glory, banished for ever from the sight of God, and shut up within a dark and hideous dungeon under ground. *2dly*, Let us consider her thirsting ardently after joys and pleasures, and doomed to everlasting torments of unquenchable flames. *Lastly*, Let us consider her without the least power of helping herself, abandoned to the heaviest load of grief, and the fury of all her other passions, acting incessantly upon her with their utmost rage and violence, and making her suffer all the pangs and agonies of a thousand deaths, yet abandoned by death itself, which, when all comforts fail, is at least a sure refuge for grief and pain in this life. Then let us make this short reflection, but let us make it with a serious attention, whether the pleasures of sin will not cost us a great deal too dear one day, if we take not
timely

timely care to expiate them with true penitential tears.

Oh! let us grieve now, that we may not grieve for ever. Let us weep in time, that we may not weep for all eternity. But let us not throw away our tears upon mere trifles. The sins we have already committed, and which we are still in danger of committing, demand and deserve them all. We weep for a dead friend, and our tears cannot bring him to life again; whereas if our souls be dead in sin, we may restore them to life with tears of penance: Heaven lost may be redeemed by them. This is the principal use for which they are designed, by the author of nature; and if we make this use of them, they will most certainly prevent the eternal but useless tears of the life to come, and be a source of everlasting comfort to our souls.

THE SIXTEENTH ENTERTAINMENT.

REFLECTIONS UPON THE PAINS OF HELL.

*Who amongst us shall dwell with devouring fire?
Who amongst us shall dwell with everlasting
burning? Isa. xxxiii. 14.*

THOUGH the truths I have delivered concerning the everlasting torments of Hell be very frightful, they will be of no use to us unless we make our reflections upon them, and draw consequences from them for the conduct of our lives. This therefore, shall be the subject of this entertainment.

The reflection, that first offers itself to my thoughts, arises from the consideration of the dreadful change of condition that befalls a wretched creature, who having loved and enjoyed the pleasures of this world, and being
still

still possessed with the same, nay, a far more violent passion for them, finds himself all on a sudden, plunged into everlasting flames. For if even the fall of great men in this world, be apt to overwhelm them with such a load of grief, as often sinks them into utter despair, how shall we find words to express, or ideas to conceive the horror, consternation, rage, and despair that seize a person, who having wallowed in all the pleasures of voluptuous life, and indulged himself in every thing to the utmost of his power, now sees himself, in a moment, reduced not only to an utter privation of all his former enjoyments, but to a state of endless misery and torments! Oh! what a terrible change is this, to pass from ease, conveniencies and pleasures, to eternal pains! From the gratifications of a sensual life, to scorching flames! In a word, from all that nature loves and admires, to a state made up of every thing she fears and abhors!

However, it would be some comfort in this dreadful turn of condition, if a damned soul had but had any hopes left, that there was still room for another change, though it were but after millions of years or ages. But what gives the heaviest aggravation to the unhappiness of his state, and compleats his misfortune, is the certain knowledge he has, that this is the last change he is ever like to see; the thought whereof being always present to his mind, is the food of that everlasting worm, which gnaws him without intermission, and never allows him the least glimpse of hope. He knows, alas! and to exclude all manner of comfort, is not permitted either to doubt, or cease thinking of it; he knows, I say, that the fiery dungeon, to which he is condemned, is to be his everlasting habitation; that burning coals are to be his bed for ever; that fire and brimstone are the only
air

air he is ever like to breathe; and that the cursed company in which he now finds himself, must always be the same: Finally, that neither his eyes must ever see, nor his ears ever hear, nor his other senses be ever entertained with any thing, but what the divine justice has ordained to be the instruments of his torments.

Saint *Teresa*, as she had a great stock of natural wit, joined with a strong and lively faith, has left us, in her writings, a most lively description of this dreadful change, of a person passing in an instant from a state of pleasures, grandeur, and esteem, to that of torments, ignominy and disgrace. “How shall I be able (says she) to express my grief, when I represent to my thoughts the condition of a person, who having always seen himself considered in this world, always loved, always waited on, respected and caressed, shall in the moment of his death find himself lost for ever, and be clearly convinced that his sufferings will never end! Nay, that it will now avail him nothing, to seek to turn away his thoughts from the consideration of eternity, as he was wont to do in this life: When he shall see himself separated, and, as it were, torn away from his divertisements and pleasures, even when he scarce thought he had begun to taste them; because whatever ends with life passes as a breath or vapour: When he shall see himself encompassed by that ghastly and cruel company, with which he must suffer for eternity: When he shall see himself thrown into a stinking pool filled with serpents, that will exercise their utmost rage upon him: Finally, when he shall see himself environed with that hideous darkness which having no light, but a gloomy flame, will only suffer him to see the instruments of his everlasting misery and torments!

“O God!

“ O God ! How far short is what I say from the real truth ! And who then blinded the eyes of that unfortunate soul to such a degree, as to hinder her from seeing that state of miseries, till she saw herself plunged into it for eternity ! Who stopped her ears to that degree, as to render her deaf to the voice of those, who forwarned her a thousand times of the grievousness and eternity of those torments ! O unhappy eternity ! O torments without end or mitigation ! Is it possible that those should not fear thee, who are even so afraid of the least bodily inconvenience, that they cannot endure to lie one single night on a bed that is not made easy for them ! ”

These were the lively ideas this saint had of the terrible change, in the condition of a person passing from the joys of this life to the torments of the next. —

But let us now consider, in the second place, how easy and delightful a penitential life would seem to a person under these unhappy circumstances, and how welcome a message it would be to him, if any one should come to let him know, that Almighty God would deliver him from that place of torments, provided he would but for a certain number of years, consent to expiate his past sins by some rigorous penance. Oh ! with what joy would he embrace the proposal ! How would he pour himself forth in praises and thanksgivings for so signal a mercy ! For what shadow of comparison is there between the least torment of Hell, and the greatest hardship of a penitential life, especially considering the eternity of the one, and the short duration of the other !

Hence it is related in the lives of the fathers in the deserts, that a certain recluse, having been
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been for some time very cold and negligent in the duties of his calling, and falling into a dangerous sickness, Almighty God was pleased to favour him with a vision of the torments of Hell: But being come to himself, and restored to health, he immediately ordered himself to be shut up within four walls, in which close prison he continued for the space of twelve years, in the continual practice of so severe a penance, that he was the astonishment of all that knew him; and being sometimes asked, why he condemned himself to so much rigour, he always answered, if they knew what he had seen, they would not wonder at what he did.

And truly, if we had a lively faith, either of the rewards or punishments of the life to come, we should be far from wondering, as we often do, at the undertaking of those holy men and women, who, renouncing all the pleasures of this world, shut themselves up to become perpetual victims of penance. For though we may justly admire the power of God's grace in their resolution and constancy, in persevering for many years, in a continual contradiction to their natural inclinations; yet if we consider at the same time the unspeakable torments, which may certainly be avoided by those penitential practices, we have no reason to be astonished, that those whose hearts are deeply penetrated with this truth, should choose any course of life, though ever so painful in itself, to secure themselves against evils that are infinitely greater. Nay, we must own, that this is even following the light of natural reason, and acting according to the dictates of a true christian self-love, if I may be allowed to call it so.

Hence it is that impenitent sinners are stiled *children, fools, and madmen*, by the word of God; because

because they act as irrationally in the concern of salvation, as if they were wholly destitute of sense and reason; since nothing can be more irrational, than to believe the everlasting torments of hell, and not use all endeavours suitable to each one's respective state to avoid them. For which reason also the damned are represented by God's word condemning their past follies, in these remarkable words: *Senseless that we were we judged their lives madness*; to wit, the penitential lives of holy men, whom they despised, and looked upon as fools, because they acted not according to the wisdom of the world; whereas, poor wretches, they now experience, to their everlasting sorrow, that they themselves were the fools, and those they took for such, were truly wise, in securing whilst they had it in their power, their eternal interest, though, with the loss of all things else.

But though all the circumstances of the change I have spoken of, viz. of a *rich man* passing from the pleasures of this life to the torments of the next, affords matter for the most melancholy reflections, there is something singularly unaccountable in the miscarriage of the *poor*. For when a rich man loses his soul, it is usually for sins by which corrupt nature is gratified in the most agreeable manner: He lives continually encompassed with a thousand snares and incentives to vice, because his wealth furnishes him with means to be at the expence of satisfying all the cravings of his inclinations: And though in so doing he really acts the part of a madman, because the present gratifications are infinitely disproportioned to the sufferings of his future state, yet considering the corruption and weakness of man's nature, it is less surprising to see him overcome by
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the strongest and most inviting allurements, than if none of these provocations to sin were before him.

When therefore a poor man loses his soul, there is scarce any thing in nature to account for it, and we may say he damns himself purely *gratis*. The very poverty of his condition screens him from the vices that are most alluring to human nature, as *ambition, luxury, intemperance, vanity, and worldly pleasures*, which usually damn the rich : Because all these vices being clogged with a continual expence to support them, are out of the reach of a man that is forced to labour for bread ; and experience is a convincing proof, that want of opportunity is one of the most effectual securities against temptations. Besides, the very hand of Providence has put the poor in a way, which if they pursue but steadily, and with a constant eye upon the end to which it leads, cannot but bring them directly to a happy eternity.

And what then are the sins by which they usually forfeit that happiness to which they are entitled, both as *christians* and as *poor* ? Their sins are such as a person acting rationally would avoid, though there were no prospect of a future happiness to induce him to it. For their very nature is such, as makes them become a perpetual vexation of spirit, keeps the mind upon the rack, and destroys all inward peace of mind, which is the only solid comfort of life : The sins I mean, are *envy, hatred, choler, fretting, murmurs, and discontents*. For it is by a long series of these uneasy and tormenting sins, that many pass from the miseries of this life to those of the next ; whereas, if they submitted with a chearful resignation to the circumstances in which God has placed them, and bore the difficulties

difficulties of their state purely for the love of God, every thing would become tolerably easy in this life, and Heaven would be their everlasting inheritance hereafter. But by continually fretting and repining at their own condition, and envying that of their neighbour, or keeping malice in their hearts, they both double all the sufferings which God has sent them, and deprive themselves of the whole reward, promised to those that bear them with a christian patience.

Now all this impatience, envy, murmuring, and repining, and indeed all other sins, are chiefly owing to a want of reflection, and our not drawing rational consequences from the faith we have of the infinitive rewards and punishments of the life to come. For the very first practical consequence we ought to draw from this belief, is, that whatever is a means to preserve us from the torments of hell, and bring us to the possession of the joys of Heaven, ought to be regarded as a real and substantial good, be it ever so disagreeable in itself; and, on the contrary, whatever puts us in danger of losing our souls, ought to be regarded as an evil, though it be ever so pleasing to our inclinations. These two principles alone, if deeply imprinted in our hearts, would rectify all our ideas of what we usually call temporal *goods* and *evils*, and place every thing in its true light. For if we took our estimate of things from those two principles, *wealth*, and *poverty*, *honours* and *disgrace*, *afflictions* and *prosperity*, would be considered no otherwise, than precisely as they may have an influence upon the happiness or unhappiness of our future state.

This leads me to a *third reflection* upon the merciful dispensation of Providence, to those
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whom God visits with afflictions in this life. For whatever is a means to rescue us from eternal evils, ought certainly to be regarded as a mercy. Now nothing of its own nature conduces more effectually to this end, than sufferings of what kind soever they be, or by what hand soever they are presented; and we are sure to profit by them, unless by our ill conduct we wilfully frustrate the designs of the Creator. The reason hereof, according to St. *Austin*, is, because it is an unalterable law, that sin must be punished either now or hereafter. It follows therefore, that the only way a sinner has to prevent the rigour of God's justice hereafter, is now to do justice upon himself, either by mortification of his own free choice, or by humbly submitting to the chastisements of his heavenly Father. For though these sufferings be not voluntary by way of choice, because it is not in our power to avoid them, yet if we submit heartily to them, we make them, as it were, become our own act and deed; and by so doing render them as acceptable to Almighty God, and satisfactory for our sins, as other works of penance, which we voluntarily impose upon ourselves.

But now, considering how backward men generally are in punishing themselves, when it is left to their own free wills, and how apt every one is to spare and favour himself, ought we not to acknowledge it as a very great mercy, when God is pleased to rescue us, as I may say, out of the hands of our own self-love and sloth, and put us under a happy necessity of suffering something for the present, rather than reserve us for those terrible punishments, which infinitely surpass, both in their grievousness and
 4 duration,

duration, all the sufferings we can imagine in this life ?

For what comparison is there between *temporal* and *eternal* ! Suppose, for instance, that a tedious and painful sickness is the cross God sends us, is not this much easier than to burn for ever in hell-fire ? if to poverty with the inconveniences that attend it be our suffering, is not this condition far more tolerable than that of the damned, who are not only reduced to an utter privation of every thing they possessed in this world, but have lost Heaven itself, which we may still secure if we please ? If God be pleased to visit us with the loss of persons that are dearest to us, is this any thing to the dreadful pain of loss, which the damned suffer in Hell, and which we have so often merited by our sins.

Finally, suppose all the sufferings of this life were heaped upon one single man, whereof there is no example to be found, might we not yet look upon his state as infinitely happy, if compared with the miseries and torments of the damned ? how great a goodness is it then in Almighty God, to put it in our power to satisfy his infinite justice, on such easy terms as are the short sufferings of this life ? What mercy is it to accept of a payment so infinitely disproportioned to the infinite debt we owe him, and be content with the satisfaction of a light and momentary pain, from those who have deserved the everlasting torments of hell-fire ? Truly, whoever is not sensible of this mercy, has either lost his faith, and flatters himself that hell-fire is a mere fiction, or his reason, in not judging it better to suffer something for a time, than be infinitely miserable for eternity.

But to come now to a conclusion ; it will not be amiss to take a serious view of the state of
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our souls, and consider impartially, what tendency the main body of our actions hath hitherto had, and if we should continue to live on, much after the same way, what would be the end of it, naturally speaking: Now, all know that nothing but mortal sin, unrepented of, can bring us to Hell. If therefore a man's conscience reproaches him with nothing that is notorious, though he cannot have an infallible security, he has, however, good grounds to hope well of himself; and the longer he has served God without offending him mortally, the better ground he has for this hope.

But if, on the contrary, a person has gone on in a kind of regular course of sinning, he has but two things to do, in order to prevent his being condemned to everlasting flames: But these two things are absolutely necessary, *viz.* *First*, To leave off sinning once for all; and, *2dly*, To do worthy fruits of penance for sins past. If the name of penance startles him, let him consider, that it is much easier doing penance here than burning in Hell. And since one of the two must be, his own reason will direct him to the choice he is to make: For we have it now in our power to choose, but we shall not have it hereafter. Oh! if we could but see those fiery dungeons kindled with unquenchable flames! If we could but hear the frightful lamentations, curses and execrations of the damned, how sweet and pleasing would the name of penance be! How should we bless God's infinite goodness for having spared us so long, and giving us still time and opportunity to expiate our sins, upon such easy terms as may be done in this life?

Let us not then demur any longer upon the choice we are to make: for all time spent in

deliberating, is but time lost : Every moment of delay makes but our case grow worse, by rendering our return to God more difficult than it was before. For in the mean time our enemy gains ground upon us, our habits take deeper root, our wills grow stiffer, our hearts more corrupt, and, finally, our passions more stubborn and rebellious against the government of reason, and impressions of grace : All which are terrible symptoms of a soul advancing by large steps to her eternal ruin. O God, preserve us from this misfortune. Give us grace to repent in time, that we may not perish eternally.

THE SEVENTEENTH ENTERTAINMENT.

OF HEAVEN.

THE JOYS OF HEAVEN SURPASS ALL HUMAN UNDERSTANDING.

The eye hath not seen, nor the ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man, what things God hath prepared for them that love him. 1 Cor. ii. 9.

HITHERTO I have only represented objects proper to affect us with terror, but the subject I am now entering upon will nourish our hope, and kindle in our hearts the most ardent desires. It is true, indeed, both *fear* and *hope* are necessary to preserve the balance of the soul, but they work upon her in a different manner. We are dragged to our duty by fear, but hope allures us to it with pleasure. The fear of punishment is often necessary to restrain the natural current of men's passions ; but the hope of an eternal crown is the noblest incentive to virtue, and prevails most upon generous souls : It is our strength in temptations, our
comfort

comfort in afflictions, and our refreshment amidst the toils and labours of this mortal life.

Let us then examine, what God has revealed, concerning the eternal reward prepared for those who love him here on earth. I shall at present confine myself to some reflections upon the words of my text, which shall be the whole subject of this entertainment.

What the word of God has revealed concerning the joys of Heaven, viz. *That neither the eye hath seen, nor the ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man, what God hath prepared for those that love him*, imports two truths: 1st, That the nature of the joys of Heaven is wholly unknown to us: and, 2^{dly}, That they surpass all human understanding. Now, both these truths furnish matter for reflections proper to give us a great idea of them.

For, in the first place, the nature and quality of the joys of Heaven being such as are unknown to us, makes it evident, that they will be very different from what we experience in this life; and this is a good proof of their being true and solid pleasures: The reason is, because we certainly know, that those of this world are not so, since they, who have had the very choicest of them at command, and drank the largest draughts of them, have after all been forced to own, that they are but *vanity and affliction of heart*. It would therefore be a very poor commendation of heavenly beatitude, to tell us it would be of the same kind, with what many have experienced here below. But when, on the contrary, we are certainly informed, that it will be something as yet unknown, and never tasted by any mortal man; that the figure of this world will pass, and a new scene appear, which no mortal eye has ever seen; this cannot

but give us a very advantageous idea of that blessed state; because we are at least assured by it, that none of those pleasures, which we already know by unquestionable experience to be adulterated and false, will be admitted into Heaven. Whence we may confidently conclude, that all its joys will be solid and substantial; that is, such as will fully answer all the ends and purposes of the most perfect and compleat beatitude.

I add, moreover, that the joys of Heaven being wholly different from those we experience in this life, give us to understand that even after the re-union of the body, they will not be borrowed from gross and earthly objects, nor by consequence conveyed to us by the ministry of material sensitive organs; for then they would be like the pleasures of this world, and *the eye might see them, the ear hear them, and the heart of man might conceive them*; but they will be of a pure, refined, spiritual nature, such as are proper for a spiritual substance, and a soul delivered from the clog of corruptible flesh and blood.

However, *St. Paul* has given us to understand, that the *body* will also have its peculiar reward. Yet the nature of this reward, even as described by *St. Paul*, will be such, that we can but have a very imperfect and obscure idea of it in this life. His words are these: *It is sown in corruption, it shall be raised in incorruption: it is sown in dishonour, it shall be raised in glory: it is sown in weakness, it shall be raised in power: it is sown a natural body, it shall be raised a spiritual body.* 1 Cor. xv. 42.

Here we have the body described by *St. Paul*, both as it is now, and will be hereafter. *It is sown*, (says he) *in corruption*; because it has the seeds of *corruption* and *mortality* interwoven in
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its very frame and constitution. It is no sooner brought into the world, but it becomes the subject of diseases, and stands in need of being daily repaired with food and sleep, and frequently patched up with remedies. Yet all this hinders not this crazy house of clay from mouldering away by insensible degrees, and falling to the ground in a small term of years.

It is also *sown in dishonour*; for of itself it is no better than a dead unactive lump, and wholly unfit for any function of life, as appears plainly from the moment that the soul is separated from it. *It is sown in weakness*: as being subject to numberless infirmities, which keep it in a continual ebbing and flowing, and such a constant circulation of changes, that its state is scarce ever fixed for the space of one day. Finally, *it is sown a natural body*; that is, made of the same earth as other bodies, and is therefore a hindrance rather than a help to the free exercise of our intellectual powers.

This is St. Paul's description of the body in its corruptible and mortal state, and we all find the truth of it by daily experience. But its condition will be most wonderfully improved at the general resurrection; for then, according to the Apostle's doctrine, it will be raised in *incorruption*, in *glory*, in *power*, and with all the qualities and advantages of a *spiritual body*. Which doubtless gives us a general idea of something very *perfect*, *beautiful*, and *noble*. But when we come to examine our ideas, we find them almost wholly made up of *negatives*; for no man can form a distinct and positive idea of an *incorruptible*, a *glorified*, or *spiritual body*, any more than he can conceive the nature of a *thought*, or the substance of a man's soul; because we have no notion but of corporeal ex-

tenſion and matter. So that we rather conceive what the body will not be, than what it really will be, at its ſecond meeting with the ſoul.

We know, for example, that the ſeeds ~~of~~ diſeaſes and mortality will be no longer a part or ingredient of its conſtitution; that it will be no longer moleſted with jarring qualities, which are the inward cauſes of its decay, nor ſubject to alterations produced by outward cauſes; that, finally, it will be diveſted of all its former weakneſſes, and ſo fitted by the omnipotent hand of God, that it will be no more a clog upon the intellectual faculties, but made to answer the very quickeſt motions of the ſoul.

All this, I ſay, we know, being aſſured of it by the revealed word of God. But all this knowledge amounts to no more than ſeparating from the body the defects and infirmities that attend it in this mortal life. But as to any clear or poſitive notion, how a true and real body can be *ſpiritual, impaſſable, and immortal*; or how it will be organized after the reſurrection, or in what manner the ſoul will be affected by it, or act in conjunction with it, theſe are myſteries, concerning which we are yet wholly in the dark; and an humble faith muſt ſupply the defect of our ideas, till God be mercifully pleaſed to favour us with an experimental knowledge of the happineſs of our future ſtate.

But if the proper nature, even of the reward prepared for the *body*, be unknown to us, the joys and pleaſures laid up for man's better part, the *ſoul*, are yet farther removed from our knowledge in this world. We are ſure it is by reaſon of their greatneſs, excellency, and ſublimeneſs, that they cannot *enter into the heart*
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of man; and that they surpass all earthly delights, as much as the future state of the soul will surpass that of her present confinement to an earthly and corruptible body. For since it is beyond all question, that God has fitted his rewards to the nature and condition of those that are to enjoy them, there is no room to doubt but that the delights he has prepared for the soul, in her perfect state, will be the purest and noblest of all pleasures; that is, such as an immortal soul, wholly separated from all *earthly allay*, or re-united to a *glorified body*, can relish, and be consummately happy in.

But if any one objects, that a bare prospect of things unknown and unexperienced, affords but little encouragement to part with the present enjoyments of life, nature being unwilling to renounce what is found experimentally pleasing, in hopes of things we know nothing of, nor how they will affect us hereafter; I answer, that though we have no clear or distinct knowledge of heavenly beatitude, we know in general that it is something very great, something highly excellent and delightful: for the word of God has taken care to represent it to us under the noblest figures; as of an *eternal feast*, an *everlasting kingdom*, a *never-fading crown of glory*, and so forth. Now, suppose it were any man's case to be invited to take possession of some foreign kingdom, and that he were at the same time informed, by persons of undoubted truth, that this kingdom abounded with all things requisite to make him a glorious and happy prince, would he be so foolish as to despise it, because he had not travelled into it, nor ever seen any part of it, nor had any particular knowledge of the proper nature or qualities of the things that

were to make him happy? Surely no rational man would ever act so foolish a part.

And is not this a faithful representation of our case in reference to the *kingdom of Heaven*? We are all invited to it; we are certainly informed, that it is a most glorious kingdom; nay, a kingdom abounding with every thing a rational soul can wish to make him perfectly happy. It is true, we know not distinctly what those things are; we have never travelled into those upper regions of eternal bliss, where God displays his glory to the blessed spirits which encompass the throne; nor have our eyes or ears been ever entertained with the glorious wonders of that place. But we are undoubtedly assured, that our very highest expectations will not only be fully satisfied, but infinitely surpassed. We are assured that when we have put off these bodies, we shall then have a clear view of those surprising glories which are now hidden from us: Which surely ought to be sufficient both to inflame our hearts with the most ardent desires of them, and spur us on to the practice of all virtues, necessary to render us worthy to be admitted to them.

This will appear more evident from the second truth contained in the words of my text, *viz. that the joys of Heaven surpass all human understanding*. For it follows plainly from this truth, that whatever state of happiness the wit of man can invent or imagine, though far beyond any thing that has or even will be attained to in this life, comes infinitely short of the real blessings God has prepared for us.

Now to apprehend, as we ought, the improvement that may be made of this reflection, I will endeavour to set forth the most compleat and perfect state of imaginary felicity a man can

can frame to himself; and by considering, first, what great and good things we are able to conceive; and then reflecting how little all this must, notwithstanding, be comparatively to a state of happiness, which, for its excellency and greatness surpasses our conceptions, we shall thence be able to make the truest judgment of the blessed state prepared for us in Heaven.

First, then, let us suppose Almighty God would create a new world or terrestrial paradise, blessed every where with a sweet and temperate air, enjoying a perpetual day, beautified with all variety of pleasing objects to delight the senses; and, in a word, abounding with every thing, not only to supply all the necessities and conveniencies of life, but even to entertain it with a continual succession and agreeable variety of pleasures.

Next, let us suppose all pains and evils banished from this place, as *hunger* and *thirst*, *heat* and *cold*, *wars* and *enmities*, *cares* and *troubles*, *diseases* and *old age*, *sin* and *death*; and, in a word, whatever in our present state contributes to make life uneasy and uncomfortable to us. Lastly, let us imagine some one chosen creature, endowed with all the rare perfections both of mind and body to fit him for the sovereign empire of this new world, and all other creatures paying an entire subjection to him, and striving to contribute, with the utmost of their power to compleat his happiness.

Now we must own the state here set forth to be such as, humanly speaking, has nothing wanting to satisfy the highest ambition and largest desires of man's heart. For it both comprehends, in a very eminent degree, every thing we usually esteem and admire, and excludes whatever man's nature fears or hates.

In effect, who of us all would not think himself happy as a rational creature could wish or desire to be, if it were his lot to be raised to the condition I have described? It is evident, that the highest felicity, and most envied state of this world, is but misery and servitude, if put in balance with it. Yet nothing is more certain, than that the real beatitude of the other world is infinitely beyond this imaginary one, how pleasing and delightful soever it appears to human sense.

Good God! is Heaven then yet infinitely more delightful than what exceeds, by so many degrees, all the delights this world can afford? Is the felicity thou hast prepared for thy faithful servants, not only infinitely greater than all the real blessings that have ever been enjoyed in this life, but even surpassing all imaginary ones we can frame to ourselves? Is it not happiness enough to be delivered from all that is painful to nature, and to be made sovereign lord and monarch of a kingdom abounding with every thing that is pleasing and delightful to us? Has thy bounty still greater blessings in store for such poor wretches as we are? Yes, Christians, for all that I have mentioned is within the bounds of what is *comprehensible*, and *can enter into the heart of man*. But the joys of Heaven are too great to be conceived: neither *the eye has seen, nor the ear heard, nor has it entered into the heart of man, what God has prepared for them that love him*. And therefore, as there is no proportion between what is comprehensible, and what surpasses all human comprehension; it follows, that the heavenly beatitude is incomparably greater than what I have described; as being a state, the joys whereof
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neither words can express, nor thoughts can reach.

It is true, the word of God gives us an account of the *celestial Jerusalem*, much resembling the imaginary world I have described. For it tells us that it is a city, whose walls are raised with *precious stones*, and every gate is made of a *rich pearl*; that its mansions are built with *choicest jewels*, and the pavement of its streets are all *transparent gold*; that in the midst there runs a chrystal river, perpetually flowing from the throne of God, upon whose banks are planted *trees of life*, making immortal all that but taste its fruit; that this blessed city enjoys an *everlasting day*; because *its sun is the Lamb*, and *the light that shines the glory of God*; that hunger and thirst are banished from it; that the inhabitants of this thrice happy city are *crowned heads*, and in secure possession of an *everlasting reign*; that the glorified bodies shine brighter than the sun, and being cloathed with incorruptibleness, enjoy an *ever-flourishing youth*, and are delivered from all those painful diseases, which insensibly destroy nature, and are the usual harbingers of death.

This is the description which the word of God gives of the *heavenly Jerusalem* and its inhabitants. However, it is certain, that the greatest part of it is made up of figurative expressions, accommodated to our earthly taste, and representing the happy state of souls in glory by types and figures of things best known and most valued in this world. For if gold and precious stones, rich buildings, and other such like sensible and material objects, were the things that are to make us happy hereafter, the joys of Heaven might easily be conceived, and every one would be capable of forming a clear
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idea of them. And, therefore, since we are assured, that they surpass all human conception, and have never entered into the heart of man, the consequence is, that all material objects, though ever so precious, and all the pleasures of this world, though ever so noble and refined, are but faint shadows of the blessings that constitute the essential beatitude of the life to come.

After these reflections it will not be surprising, that the saints had no other concern in this life, than how to secure Heaven to themselves; that they had it always in their view, bore it continually in their hearts, made it the object of all their affections, the centre of all their desires, and the end of all their actions. For they were directed by the light of faith, and their faith taught them, that God had created them for eternal and incomprehensible joys, to which the enjoyments of this life bore no proportion. This was inducement enough to make them despise the one, and continually thirst after the other. This gave them a disgust of all earthly pleasures, and made the riches and honours of this world appear as contemptible to their thoughts, as they are in themselves. This, finally, made them set so high a value upon Heaven, as to purchase it, even with the most painful sufferings. And this ought likewise to have at least so far an influence upon us, as both to render us faithful in the discharge of all the duties of a Christian life, and make us submit cheerfully to all the crosses and afflictions Almighty God is pleased to send us.

THE EIGHTEENTH ENTERTAINMENT.

OF THE BEATIFIC VISION.

Now we see through a glass darkly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then shall I know even as also I am known. 1 Cor. xiii. 12.

TO see God *face to face*, and know him *as he is himself*, is that perfect and consummate happiness of a man's soul, of which I am now going to speak: and I am very sensible of the difficulty of the task I have undertaken. For we are so unacquainted with what passes in the other world, that to treat of this subject is like walking in a dark and unknown path, where we may very easily either stumble upon some error, or mistake groundless fancies for solid truths. I shall, therefore, endeavour to proceed with so much caution, as not to advance one single step, without taking either the holy scriptures, or at least some of the fathers or approved divines, for my guide. I have already said something concerning the glory of the body, and shall at present only speak of that part of heavenly beatitude which regards the soul, and which St. *Austin* has epitomized in these three words; *videbimus, amabimus, laudabimus*; we shall *see*, we shall *love*, we shall *praise*. The first word expresses the whole substance of the *beatific vision*, as divines call it, that is, the sight of God, which makes the soul happy. The two other words express the immediate and inseparable effects of it; *viz.* the *love, joy, and delight*, which result from this blessed vision in the soul: of which I shall treat in my next discourse, intending to make the *beatific vision* alone the subject of this entertainment.

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It is certain, that man's soul being a spiritual substance, cannot be happy but in the possession of some spiritual good, nor perfectly happy but in the possession of the most perfect spiritual good: And therefore, when the scripture seems to promise certain sensible and material goods, as *crowns and kingdoms, youth, without decay; wealth, power, and magnificent palaces*; when it tells us, that the saints shall *eat and drink* in the kingdom of God; finally, when it sets forth the *celestial Jerusalem* as a city abounding in all such things as are most valued in this world, as built with *precious stones*, paved with the *purest gold*, beautified with *stately towers*, and so forth, we must, as I have already observed, take care not to imagine, as if the enjoyment of things of this nature were to be the essential reward of the life to come. For this would be to set up a kind of *Mahometan* beatitude instead of the *Christian* one, and translate the world itself into Heaven: And what can be the consequence hereof, but our making the world, instead of Almighty God, our last end, and the principal object of our love, hope, and desire? St. *Austin* himself, in his comment upon the 86th *psalm*, has taken care to precaution us against this error. *Let us beware (says he) not to propose to ourselves any pleasures like those we relish here on earth: For otherwise all our temperance, which makes us now abstain from worldly pleasures, will be the fruit of self-love. There are those that fast, only to eat afterwards with a better relish: If therefore you believe that the pleasures of Heaven will be like those of this world, and you refrain from them now, upon no other motive than to enjoy them more fully hereafter, you imitate those that fast only to prepare themselves for a feast, and in the very practice of temperance are guilty of greater intemperance.*

Thus

Thus St. *Austin*, who is very large upon this subject, to prevent our falling into an error which would utterly destroy the love of God, and set up self-love in its place. It is therefore an undoubted truth, that the essential felicity of the soul, consists not in the enjoyment of any of those sensible objects or pleasures, to which self-love inclines us in this life; and that whatever expressions in scripture seem to favour this sort of beatitude, are not to be understood literally, but in a figurative or spiritual sense, as will appear beyond all question, from other passages of holy writ, which I shall have occasion to quote hereafter.

First, then, the scripture tells us, that the blessed souls in Heaven shall *see God face to face*, that they shall see him *clearly*, and as he is in himself: For the better understanding whereof we must observe, that to *see* and *know God*, are synonymous terms, and signify the self-same thing. For Almighty God being a *pure spirit*, cannot be seen with corporeal eyes; and the soul being also a *spiritual substance*, has, properly speaking, no eyes but what are spiritual. Now, the eye of the soul is her *understanding*: Whatever therefore the soul *knows*, she is properly said to *see*, and to *see clearly* what she *knows clearly*.

This being supposed, the scripture, I say, tells us, that the saints in Heaven shall not only *see God*, but see him *clearly*. This is St. *Paul's* doctrine, in the words of my text. *Now we see as through a glass in a dark sort, but then face to face: Now I know in part, but then shall I know even as I am known.* It is true indeed, we know God in this life, but we know him only by faith; and though faith be certain, it is however obscure, it shews him not as he is in himself;

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we only see him at a distance, and, as it were, through a dark mist or cloud. But hereafter this cloud will be removed from before the eyes of the soul. *Faith* will then cease, and the *sight of glory* succeed in its place. And then will the infinite beauty, and incomprehensible majesty of God appear in its full lustre. God will then no longer hide his face from us. No cloud or darkness will then interpose, to rob us of any part of this blessed object. But we shall see him clearly; we shall see him intimately united to us; we shall see him as he is himself.

Oh! what a blessed sight will this be! How glorious, how delightful! How worthy of a Christian soul to covet and thirst after! For by thus seeing God clearly, and as he is himself, we shall be perfectly acquainted with all those dark and sublime mysteries, which now surpass all human understanding: As the distinction of three persons in one indivisible nature; the eternal procession of the *Son* from the *Father*, and of the *Holy Ghost* from the *Father* and *Son*, and the ineffable union of the *divine* and *human* nature subsisting in one *increated person*.

2dly, We shall see all the infinite attributes, that is, perfections of God. We shall see that boundless *wisdom*, which *reaches strongly from end to end*, and *disposes all things sweetly*: That unlimited *power*, which, with a single word, produced Heaven and Earth out of nothing. That fathomless depth, and inexhaustible fund of *goodness*, which incessantly communicates itself to all created beings: and that infinite *mercy* which prompted him to give his only Son to redeem mankind.

Finally, in seeing God clearly, we shall discover all the hidden ways of his *providence* in the government of this world. As why innocence is often permitted to be oppressed, and wickedness

ness to prosper : Why our prayers are sometimes heard, and at other times rejected : Why miseries and poverty were the lot of some, and prosperity and wealth the undeserved blessing of others. He that was persecuted, hated and contemned, will then clearly see why God allotted him that portion. He that was sick and poor, deprived of all conveniencies of life, and forced to earn his bread with the daily sweat of his brows, whilst others enjoyed their ease, and wallowed in pleasures, will then be thoroughly convinced of the infinite wisdom and justice of this seeming partiality, and confess that God was more favourable to him, than he would have been to himself, had he been permitted to make his own desires the rule of his choice.

All this I say, and infinitely more than I am able to express, will the saints see in seeing God; and that not confusedly, but clearly and distinctly; not successively or by parts, but altogether, and at one single, unchangeable, and eternal view. *Non erunt ibi* (says St. *Austin*) *volubiles cogitationes nostræ ab aliis ad alias euntes atque rediuntes*. There, viz. in Heaven, our thoughts shall not be roving, or passing to and fro, from object to object; but from the very moment the soul is admitted to the beatific vision, the unsettledness and wandering of her thoughts, which imperfection attends her in this life, will forthwith cease, and her whole attention be eternally and immoveably fixed upon one single object, which is God himself, in whom she will see all things necessary to render her completely happy.

It remains now only to shew, that this clear sight or knowledge of God is that which makes the soul happy. St. *Austin* gives this reason for it; because to see or know God clearly, is to
possess

possess him : *eum nosse habere est*. And since a soul that is in possession of an infinite good, cannot be completely happy, it follows that the soul's beatitude consists in this clear knowledge of God. This reason of St. *Austin* is grounded upon our Saviour's own words, *John* 17th, where he addressed himself thus to his eternal Father : *This is life everlasting to know the only true God*. To know him by the dim light of *faith*, is but a necessary disposition to eternal life ; but to know him by the clear *light of glory*, is that which puts the soul in a secure and everlasting possession of him.

However, since to our imagination there appears a large difference between *seeing* and *possessing* a thing, St. *Austin*, to correct this error of imagination, endeavours to prove it by this argument, that in relation to God they are the same. Because God being the most excellent and transcendent good, cannot be possessed but by that part of man which is most excellent in him, viz. his *soul*. And since the *understanding* is the noblest faculty, and *knowledge* the noblest operation of the soul, he concludes, that whatever is possessed by the soul, is possessed by knowing, *quicquid autem mente habetur, nescendo habetur* ; and thence he infers, that to know God clearly, is to possess him.

This is St. *Austin's* argument, which sets this matter in as easy a light as its obscurity will permit. In effect, all intellectual beings from the highest to the lowest, have no other way of *possessing* than by *knowing* God himself, who is the supreme intellectual being, has from all eternity possessed himself, and been infinitely happy by *comprehensively* knowing his own infinite essence. The *angels* are also perfectly happy by possessing God ; and possess him no otherwise than

than by seeing him clearly. Hence our Saviour, to describe their happiness, expresses it in these words: *the angels in Heaven always see the face of the Father who is in Heaven.* Now then, to come down to the lowest intellectual being, which is man's soul, since our Saviour assures us, that in the life to come *we shall be like the angels of God*, it follows that our happiness will be the same in substance as theirs; and that as they see God *face to face*, and in thus seeing him possess him, and in possessing him are perfectly happy, so shall we also possess God by seeing him, and by possessing him be partakers with them in eternal bliss.

Hence it is that holy Job, in the extremity of his afflictions, had recourse to no other comfort than the hopes he had of being one day admitted to this blessed vision. *I believe*, says he, *that my Redeemer liveth, and in the last day I shall rise out of the earth, and be compassed again with my skin, and in my flesh shall see God, whom I myself shall see, and mine eyes shall behold, and no other: This hope is laid in my bosom.* This also made the royal prophet, who had a lively faith of the future state of souls, express such ardent longings to see God. *As the hart*, says he, *pants after the water-brooks, so pants my soul after thee, O God; my soul thirsts for God, for the living God. O, when shall I come and appear before thy face!* But why did this holy prophet thus earnestly desire to see the face of God? He gives this reason for it in another psalm; *I shall be satiated, when thy glory shall appear.* For he knew this blessed sight would put him in secure possession of an infinite good, and leave no desire of his soul unsatisfied.

But if you ask how is it possible, that since there is an infinite disproportion between the infinite

finite majesty of God, and the littleness inseparable from the condition of a created being; since the scripture tells us, that God *dwells in inaccessible light*; finally, since God himself declared to his great servant *Moses*, desiring to see his face, *that no man can see his face and live*; if you ask, how is it possible that any creature should be able to bear the clear sight of God, and intimate presence of so great a majesty? I answer, that no soul would be able to bear the clear sight of God, were she not first prepared and fitted for it by a certain supernatural quality, which school-men call the *light of glory*. I will not pretend to explain to you the nature of this quality, but hope we shall one day experience the happy effects of it, and we shall then know what it is, to our everlasting joy and comfort. However, divines agree, that it is the most sublime and perfect participation of the divine nature a pure creature is capable of: So that as the very lowest degree of *sanctifying grace*, surpasses in its intrinsic value any thing, though ever so perfect within the sphere of *nature*, so in like manner this *light of glory* transcends in excellency whatever is most sublime within the order of *grace*. St. Denis defines it, *influxus substantificus divinitatis*, a substantial influence of the divinity. Which expression seems to import, as if Almighty God darted, as it were, some rays of his own infinite light into the souls of the blessed, to enable them to bear his divine presence.

Hence divines attribute principally two effects to this *light of glory*. The first is to fortify and strengthen the soul in such a manner as to enable her to subsist in the presence of God, and not be dazzled with the *splendor of his glory*. It is of this light, according to St. *Austin's* explication,
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the royal prophet speaks in his 35th psalm, where he addresses himself thus to God, *in lumine tuo videbimus lumen*; in thy light we shall see light. For here the prophet distinguishes between two lights, viz. that *which we shall see*, and that *by which we shall see it*. The first is God himself, and it is what we ask, when we pray for the departed souls, that *eternal light may shine unto them*: But that, whereby we shall see it, is the *light of glory* I now speak of. So that the prophet's meaning is, that by virtue of the *light of glory*, which will be infused into us, we shall see God, who is himself *eternal light*.

But no one speaks more clearly of this blessed light, than the prophet *Isaiah*, chap. lx. where his prophetic spirit, suddenly carried him from the contemplation of the future increase and prosperity of the church militant, to that of the glory of the church triumphant; he discourses thus upon it: *Thy sun shall be no more thy light by day, neither shall the brightness of the moon give light unto thee: But the Lord shall be unto thee an everlasting light, and thy God, thy glory. Thy sun shall no more go down, neither shall thy moon withdraw itself, but the Lord shall be thy everlasting light, and the days of thy mourning shall be ended*. Thus speaks this holy prophet, declaring thereby, that God will not only be clearly seen by the saints, but that himself will be the light, whereby they shall see him.

The second effect, which divines attribute to the *light of glory*, is its raising the soul in such an eminent degree above herself, as to render her, as it were, all *Godlike* and *divine*. Now in this, they ground themselves upon this celebrated sentence of *St. John*, *We know*, says he, *that when God shall appear, we shall be like unto him, because we shall see him as he is*. By which
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the apostle means not barely a likeness of *conformity*; for that may be attained to by the help of grace, even in this life; but, doubtless, some *closer union* and nearer relation to God: But whatever it be (for no words can express it) we may boldly conceive something extraordinary, and surpassing by many degrees the most elevated *extasies* and *unions*, the greatest saints have ever experienced in this life, since these were only some kind of antipasts of future glory.

And therefore spiritual writers, to give us the highest ideas possible of it, endeavour to explain it by the similitude of a red-hot iron, which has the fire so incorporated with it, that it seems to be no more iron, but transubstantiated into fire; or of a drop of water, which being poured into any quantity of wine, loses all its taste and colour, seems to change its nature, and be turned into wine. For so the blessed souls in Heaven, by virtue of that intimate participation of Almighty God, are so closely united to him, that they seem wholly lost in that ocean of bliss, and become, as it were, one and the same thing with him. *For when God shall appear, we shall be like unto him, because we shall see him as he is.*

O what a blessed change will this be! How different from that unhappy one, which attends the soul at her entrance into her clayey mansion of a mortal and corruptible body! For though she be spiritual by nature, and formed immediately by the pure hand of God, yet by being immersed in flesh and blood, she takes strangely after the nature of her earthly companion, and in some measure degenerates into earth. *But when this corruptible shall put on incorruption, and this mortal shall be clothed with immortality*, then will she become the subject of a quite different transformation. Her heavenly spouse, by uniting

ing her closely to himself, will then not only take away from her all remains of earthly allay, but enrich her with so large a portion of his own perfections, as to render her the perfect image of himself. *For when God shall appear, we shall be like unto him, because we shall see him as he is.*

But, to conclude; we must observe what follows immediately in St. John, *Every man*, says he, *that has this hope, purifies himself even as he is pure.* No doubt, but we all hope to be one day partakers of this happy transformation, by seeing God *face to face*. But we must consider whether this hope be well grounded; and St. John has given us here a mark to judge by, whether it be or no. *Every man that has this hope, purifies himself, even as he is pure.* For it follows hence, that they who make it not their business to purify themselves in this life, hope in vain to see God in the life to come: For which reason also Christ has promised the clear sight of God, as a peculiar reward to the clean of heart: *Blessed are the clean of heart, for they shall see God.* Now cleanness of heart, considering how prone man's nature is to sin, can only be acquired by our daily endeavouring to wash off the stains we have already contracted, and adorn our souls with the virtues which will either be rewarded, or perfected in heaven: For though we seldom attain the ultimate perfection of any virtue in this life, yet to be rightly qualified for Heaven, we must possess them all in some degree. There are certain dispositions, indispensibly requisite, to fit us for the state of bliss, and whoever goes out of the world without them goes unprepared.

If therefore we aspire to eternal happiness, we must make it our business to secure the necessary disposition for it: If we desire to possess God

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in glory, we must first take care to preserve him in our souls *by grace* : Finally, if we hope to be hereafter *like unto God*, we must study to become in some measure conformable to him in this life, by cleansing our souls, as far as this mortal state will permit, from all sinful defilements, and imitating his infinite holiness, by the constant practice of an innocent and holy life. *For every man that has this hope, purifies himself, even as he is pure.* And by thus purifying himself becomes worthy to be admitted to his blessed sight, where he will *love* and praise him, and *rejoice* in him for ever, as I shall shew at large in my next discourse.

THE NINETEENTH ENTERTAINMENT.
OF THE LOVE, JOY, AND PRAISES RESULTING
FROM THE BEATIFIC VISION.

Lord, it is good for us to be here. Matth. xvii.

THUS spoke St. *Peter*, transported with excessive joy and pleasure, to see his dear Lord and master all-glorious; though himself had no share in this transformation, but was a bare witness or spectator of it: And how then will a soul be filled with delight, when she finds herself, all on a sudden, translated from the miseries of this life, to a state of immortality and inconceivable joys! with what feeling sense of her happiness will she then say, *Lord, it is good for us to be here!* And how will her joy be increased, when she is undoubtedly assured of the unchangeableness of her state, and that her eternal abode is to be with Christ in glory! When she will not only see Christ's sacred humanity outshining the brightness of the sun, but all the infinite beauties and perfections of the divine nature;

nature; the clear light whereof, in that which constitutes her *essential* happiness, as I have shewn at large in my last discourse; and will now proceed to explain its immediate and inseparable effects: I mean, the *love, joy, and delight*, resulting from this blessed vision in the soul, which shall be the whole subject of this entertainment.

It is impossible to see God clearly, and not love him. Because infinite *beauty*, infinite *majesty*, infinite *goodness*, and *perfection*, clearly seen, are objects that command love with an irresistible force. And therefore divines say, that though the saints in Heaven love God with the whole propensity of their souls, and desire nothing more than to love him, and see him eternally beloved by all his creatures; yet, to speak properly, they do not love him *freely*; because seeing nothing in him but what is infinitely good and worthy of love, they have it not in their power not to love him, but are under a happy necessity of loving him, with the whole capacity of their souls.

However, to give you the clearest idea I can of the greatness of their love, the proper seat whereof is that part of the soul which is called the *will*, it is requisite to consider, the unhappy condition of man's *will* in this life, comparatively to her happy state in the life to come. Now man's will is commonly called by divines a *blind power*, because she has no light of her own; but all the light she has is communicated to her by the understanding, which also is oftener a false light than a true one: If she *fears, hates, or flies* any thing, it is because the understanding represents it as an *evil*, whether it be real or imaginary. In like manner, if the understanding represents the possession of any thing as a considerable *good*, or at least as preferable to the privation of it, the *will* conceives immediately a

love for it, moves towards it with eager desires, if it be absent, and is agreeably affected with it, if it be present.

But this pleasure seldom lasts long in this life, but after a short enjoyment is either utterly destroyed, or very much abated by some considerable defect appearing in the object, which insensibly weans the will from her first affection to it, and often changes it into aversion.

Now this inconstancy and changeableness of the will in this life, is chiefly owing to the *mixed nature* of all earthly goods and evils. For as there is scarce any thing so bad, but has some good interwoven in its nature, or resulting from it, so there is nothing so good and perfect, but upon a strict and impartial examination, some blemish or imperfection may be discovered in it: And this is the reason why neither our *inclinations* nor *aversions* are ever in a fixed state in this life, but are always either ebbing or flowing, according as *good* or *evil* appears to preponderate in their respective objects. Thus the same things or persons, differently represented, may appear very agreeable at one time, and very disagreeable at another: We may pursue a thing with an eager desire to-day, grow indifferent to it to-morrow, and perhaps hate it the next day after, because what we loved at first, being afterwards regarded in a different light, we may discover defects and imperfections in it, which were before concealed from us.

Neither is this changeableness of the will only in relation to the things of this world, which have all their allay mixed with their very natural frame and texture, but likewise in relation to the most important spiritual concerns, and such things as our faith assures us to be *unmixed goods and evils*; as the possession of *sanc-*
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tifying grace on the one hand, and the loss of it on the other. For no man doubts but that *sanctifying grace* is an *unmixed good*, and the loss of it an *unmixed evil* in its nature. Besides, our understanding, directed by faith, is convinced that God is an *infinite good*, and that the practice of virtue alone can secure this infinite good to us, and sin alone can deprive us of it; and how comes it then that the *will*, being directed, as I have said, in all her motions by the *understanding*, is not in a continual eager pursuit after the possession of this good? Or that she flies not with the utmost abhorrence every thing that may rob us of it?

The first reason hereof is, because, however advantageous our ideas are of Almighty God, and though we know them to be unquestionably true, yet they are so imperfect and obscure, that they make but a very weak impression upon the heart, which is much more powerfully wrought upon by the clear ideas of *sensible goods*, conveyed to her in a feeling and palpable manner by the ministry of the senses, than by mere *spiritual objects* proposed by the dim light of faith, and which cannot be seen, nor felt, nor clearly understood.

The second reason is, the almost continual dissipation of the mind, diverted from the thoughts of God, partly by the cares, and partly by the amusements of this life. So that the ideas we have of God either lying dormant by an inapplication, or being stifled in a throng of worldly thoughts, the heart or will is very little affected with the passing glances we sometimes cast towards him.

But the third and principal reason is, because the understanding itself acts many times a treacherous part, confederate with the enemies

of our salvation, and instead of guiding the will by the light of *faith*, seduces her by the suggestions of flesh and blood. So that, although it represents Almighty God as an *infinite good*, it discourages the will from pursuing the acquisition of it, by representing it as a task incumbered with difficulties almost insuperable to human nature. It paints upon the imagination all the restraints and self-denials of a virtuous life in such frightful colours, and sets forth the charms of liberty and pleasures in such an agreeable light, that the will, prevailed upon by these deceitful appearances, is easily determined to consent to sin, for the sake of the pleasure annexed to it, and to reject God's grace, by reason of the combats and difficulties that attend the preservation of it. Because *pleasures* are considered as a *good*, and *self-denials* as an *evil* to nature.

This is the unfortunate condition of the *will* in this mortal state: Ever various and inconsistent in her desires, pursuing with eagerness imaginary goods, and flying from imaginary evils. But *when this corruptible shall put on incorruption, and this mortal shall be clothed with immortality*: When *faith* shall cease, and the *light of glory* succeed in its place, then will she be entirely delivered from this servile subjection to the caprice of a deluded imagination, and the misrepresentations of a deceitful understanding. Then will she be no more in danger of relapsing into her natural inconstancy: Because the object of her love will always be and always appear the same; that is, infinitely beautiful, and infinitely good. And the *light of glory* shewing this blessed object eternally present, and shewing it clearly, and as it is in itself, her love will not only be without check, but

but so immoveably fixed, as to be beyond all possibility of abatement, interruption, or change.

But now, to bring these reflections upon the two different states of the soul into some order and method, the *first* material difference between the condition of a soul in bliss and her state in this mortal life is, that the ideas we have of God in this life are extremely *weak* and *obscure*. We know indeed that there is a God, and that he is a being infinitely perfect. Thus far our faith directs us. But we have no distinct ideas either of his essence, or of any one of his infinite perfections: Because we have no light whereby to see or know them. And therefore as our knowledge of him is weak and obscure, so is our love of him languid and unactive. But in Heaven, where the blessed behold God *face to face*, where they see all his perfections clearly and distinctly, and as they are in themselves, their wills being under no impediment either from any defect of knowledge, or mixture of imperfections in the object, they love him from the very first moment with the whole capacity, strength, and power of their souls.

2dly, In this life we are continually conversant with sensible objects, and the heart is most lamentably divided between God and his creatures. Husband and wife, children, friends, and relations, external goods, and temporal concerns, are but too apt to challenge a large share in our affections; and we all find, by sad experience, what powerful attractives these sensible objects are, and how forcibly they draw us towards the earth, so that the love even of the *just* in this life is commonly so imperfect, that though God reigns *sovereignly*, he reigns not *absolutely*, in their hearts: I mean, though his

love be *predominant*, it is not without check or allay, but has many inferior partners with it.

But in Heaven, where the saints are wholly absorbed in God; where, to speak properly, they see nothing but God, because they see him in every thing, and every thing in him; where, finally, all their thoughts center in God, and are incessantly employed in the contemplation of this glorious object; they also love God with a simple, pure, and undivided love. Their hearts are a throne whereon God reigns as absolute monarch, and part of their souls is so filled with him, that there is no room for any thing else; or if they love his creatures, it is purely in him, and for his sake. So that all the love they have either for themselves or others, is ultimately terminated in God. And in a word, God is all in all things to them. ✓

3dly, As our attention in this world is often diverted from God by the cares and amusements of human life, so is the love even of the just but too frequently interrupted. It is uniform, unfixed, inconstant, and like an intermitting fever divided between cold and hot fits. But in Heaven, where the saints have the eyes of their souls immoveably turned towards their beloved object, and nothing interposes to take God out of their sight, their love is uniform, constant, and uninterrupted. It is one eternal act, or rather one eternal extasy and rapture. It is a fire (as St. *Austin* calls it) that always burns, because the fuel that nourishes it, is never consumed.

But the most material difference, and ground of all the rest, is, that although man's soul be created to enjoy God eternally, and has by consequence an inclination in her nature to be united to him, yet in this world this inclination is so smothered,

smothered, under the weight of flesh and blood, or weakened by the continual opposition of the contrary inclinations of the body, that it is scarce able to exert itself, seems many times wholly extinct, and even when it is most active, carries her but very slowly and feebly towards her last end.

But when she is now wholly disengaged from this clog or incumbrance, when this heavy load of flesh and blood, which bore her down to the earth, is now taken off, no tongue can express with what activity, or rather violence, a soul, perfectly purified from sin, is carried towards God, the only object, source, and center of her happiness. We may justly compare it to the impetuous current of a rapid river, when the banks that kept it in are broke down; or to the violent motion of a stone, that is carried down with its whole weight to its center, when the obstacle that held it up is removed. For just so, when the soul is now delivered from the clog of the body, and broke loose from the chains that held her captive, the inclinations she has in her nature to be united to God, will carry her to this beloved object, with an impetuosity not to be expressed in words.

And who then can conceive the extasies of love and joy, when she now finds herself in full possession of the infinite good for which she was created; and to which her nature carries her with such ardent desires! Who can tell me with what delight she plunges herself into that ocean of bliss, with what avidity she drinks of that torrent of delights! With what ardent affections she enjoys the presence of her heavenly spouse! Methinks I hear her congratulate with herself as she is represented in the Canticles of *Solomon*: *I have found whom my soul loveth, I have laid hold*

of him, and I will not let him go; I have found him who is the only joy and delight of my heart; my spouse, my sovereign good, my God, and my all. I have found him, and nothing shall evermore separate me from him.

However, though it be impossible either to express or conceive the excessive joy of a soul now in secure possession of eternal bliss, I cannot end my discourse without saying something of it. And all I can say is, that her joy will be proportioned to the infinite greatness of the good she possesses on the one hand, and the ardent love she has for it on the other. *Their joy (says St. Austin) will be according to the measure of their love: Their love will be according to the measure of their knowledge: And their joy in thee, O Lord, will be equal both to their knowledge and love of thee.* So that as the blessed souls will be wholly filled with God, so will they also be filled or rather overwhelmed with excessive delight, joy, and pleasure.

Hence the royal Prophet says, that the blessed in Heaven *shall be inebriated with the plenty of the House of God.* Which figurative expression represents most naturally the superabundance of their delight and joy: For as the virtue of wine by inebriation makes the heart light, and forget past sorrows; so will the large draught of heavenly delight cause a certain divine inebriation or drunkenness in the blessed souls, the happy effects whereof will be eternal transports of joy, and utter forgetfulness of all past sufferings, conflicts, persecutions and afflictions: The delicious wine, presented to them by their heavenly bridegroom, will utterly drown all past sorrows, and their undoubted assurance of the perpetuity of their state, and their being now for ever delivered from them, will perfectly complete their joy.



joy. No more troubles, no more combats, no more persecutions; no more hunger or thirst, heat or cold, poverty or pain, sickness or death.

O blessed joys! O happy state! To be forever delivered from the very fear of any evil, and enjoy whatever the heart can wish or desire! *To see God clearly, to love him ardently, to praise him, and rejoice eternally in him! To possess what we shall never cease to love, and love what we shall never cease to possess! Oh! how truly may we say with the royal prophet, Blessed are they that dwell in thy house, O Lord, they shall praise thee for ever and ever. They shall praise thee for ever, because they shall never cease to love thee; and they shall never cease to love thee, because they shall never cease to behold thy blessed face.*

But, O unhappy mortals, who are yet confined to this vale of tears! Unhappy mortals, who are banished from thy blessed sight, and condemned to see thee with fear and trembling, amidst a thousand dangers in the darksome labyrinths of this miserable world. However, permit us not at least, O God, to be so miserable as to fall in love with our misery; permit us not to grow fond of our exile, or sit down satisfied under our chains. But since it is by thy appointment we are banished for a time from thy presence, let us indeed submit to the sentence, but at the same time let us be heartily sensible, that our greatest misfortune in this life is to be separated from thee, since otherwise we are in danger of losing thee for ever. And therefore, lest our present banishment should unhappily terminate in an everlasting separation hereafter, grant that, though we live on earth, Heaven may always be the principal object of all our wishes, hope, and desires; that like true *Israelites*, we may despise the insipid

pleasures of the sinful *Babylon*, this world : And when our inclinations invite, or even importune us to partake of the *Babylonish* joys, grant that we may reject their solicitations with a Christian disdain, and answer them as the *Israelites* did : *How shall we sing or rejoice in a strange land ! If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand be forgot. Let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth, if Jerusalem be not my chief joy.*

O heavenly *Jerusalem*, thou city of perfect joy and peace ! Thou dwelling place of saints and angels ! Thou palace of the King of Glory ! Be thou the only object of our love, the only mark at which all our hopes and wishes may be levelled, the only indivisible point where all our hearts desires may center. Let this world become despicable to us : Let us count all things in it as dung to purchase thee ; that when the term of our exile is expired, we may be worthy to be received into thy sacred mansions, there to see, love and praise God for all eternity.

THE TWENTIETH ENTERTAINMENT.

THE IDEA THE SAINTS HAD OF HEAVEN.

The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. Rom. viii. 18.

THE sufferings of this life bear certainly no proportion to the joys prepared in Heaven. Because the sufferings of this life are short, and the joys of Heaven are everlasting. The sufferings of this life are never without some mixture of comfort, and the joys of Heaven are pure and unmixed. Finally, the sufferings of this life can never exceed a certain degree of violence, being limited by the natural weakness of
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of the body ; but the joys of Heaven being subjected in an incorruptible and immortal soul, are as boundless as her appetites and desires, which can only be satisfied with the possession of an infinite good.

This made the saints both of the old and new law set so high a value upon Heaven, as to strive to purchase it with the most laborious endeavours, and the most painful sufferings either inflicted by others, or of their own free choice. *St. Paul gives us this account of some part of their sufferings : Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. And others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheep-skins, and goat-skins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented ; of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. Heb. xi. 35, 36, &c.*

Now since men's actions are but the natural result of their practical ideas of things ; since we cannot make a truer judgment of the value a person has for any thing, than by the pains he takes for it, and the price he sets upon it : finally, since both the ideas and actions of the saints ought to be the model of ours, because it marks out clearly the way that leads to the happiness they possess, the whole design of this concluding discourse, of the *four last things*, shall be to give you some account of the great ideas the saints had of Heaven, and the value they set upon it.

The *kingdom of Heaven* is compared, by our Saviour, unto a merchant-man seeking goodly pearls ; who, when he had found one pearl of great price, he
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went and sold all he had, and bought it. Matt. xiii. 45, 46. 'This pearl is the possession of God by grace in this life, and in glory hereafter. Now, that we may be encouraged to imitate this wise merchant, in sparing no cost or labour to purchase so great a treasure, we must take care to inform ourselves well of the true value of it. The lovers, therefore, of this world, must not be consulted in this matter; because their hearts being too sensibly affected with worldly objects, they are apt to judge of things with reference to what pleases or displeases for the present. *The carnal man* (says St. Paul, 1 Cor. ii. 14.) *receiveth not the things of the spirit of God: For they are foolishness unto him: Neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.*

Hence it is, that the lovers of this world are, by the word of God, stiled *fools* and *children*. Because, as fools and children have not judgment enough to know false stones from diamonds, and are often better pleased with a pretty bauble than the richest jewel; so the lovers of this world, are much fonder of the toys and trifles wherewith it amuses them for the present, than the solid treasures of the life to come. And so it is no wonder, that the price of Heaven is fallen so low in the general opinion of mankind, and that so few are heartily disposed, I will not say, *to sell all they have to purchase it*, but even to do or suffer any thing considerable for it.

But the saints who were animated with the spirit of God, and had their hearts free from all bias of earthly affections, are the only proper judges in this case. *But we* (says St. Paul) *have received not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God, that we might know the things that are given unto us by God.* From these then,

then, we must learn the true value of this *rich pearl*; and we need but take a view of their lives and sufferings, to be thoroughly convinced of the great idea they had of it. For deeds are the most faithful interpreters of the mind; and he who spares no pains or cost to compass the end he aims at, shews plainly how near it lies to his heart, and that it has the preference of all other things.

First, then, let us consider the laborious and suffering lives of the primitive planters of the gospel; I mean, the blessed *Apostles*, and other apostolic men, who have earned Heaven, as I may say, with the labour of their hands, and sweat of their brows. What hardships have they not endured in *hunger and thirst, heat and cold, weariness and watchings, interior solitudes and troubles, poverty and nakedness, contumelies, derisions, and persecutions*! How were they continually harrassed, with long and painful journeys, to carry the faith of Christ into barbarous and savage nations! What dangers have they not run through by land and sea! What difficulties have they not struggled with in banishments and prisons; being every where, both by reason of their poverty, and the mortal hatred their enemies bore them, destitute of the ordinary comforts and conveniencies of life!

And what induced these faithful labourers in Christ's vineyard, who naturally loved their liberty and ease, as well as other mortals, to undertake so difficult and laborious a task, and continue indefatigably in it to their last breath? Their encouragement was the firm hope they had of seeing themselves one day rewarded, with the eternal repose of the life to come; *expecting the blessed hope, and coming of the great God*. This they looked upon not only as a sufficient,

ficient, but superabundant recompence of all the hardships and labours they could undergo. This *blessed hope* was the cordial that daily gave new life and spirit to their actions, and kept them from fainting under the burden with which they were charged. And if they regretted any thing, it was to see how little they were able to do, to answer the bounty of a master, who had prepared such glorious rewards for them; and that they had but each, one single life to employ in his service.

In the next place, let us take a view of all those illustrious champions, who have gone to heaven through *fire and water*, as the scripture expresses it; that is, through all the severest trials that art or malice could invent, to make the passage frightful to them. Here we shall see innumerable persons of all ages and conditions, running to *racks, gibbets, scourges, and axes*, with the same eagerness and alacrity of mind, as if they were hastening to some agreeable entertainment: Some were torn limb from limb by wild beasts; others thrown into boiling cauldrons; others broiled alive upon gridirons; others nipped with red-hot pincers; others beaten to death with scorpions, rods, or plummets; others, finally, after the mangling of their limbs, condemned to undergo a lingering martyrdom in mines or dungeons.

But the manner how these Christian heroes suffered, is yet more remarkable than their sufferings. For, instead of betraying any weakness or impatience under the afore-mentioned trials, they rather behaved themselves like men affected with some exquisite pleasure; some singing canticles of joy; others fearless of their tormentors; and all glorifying God, for having judged them worthy to suffer in his cause: Which plainly

ly shews, the great idea they had of the happy state towards which they were hastening; and that they were heartily convinced, with the blessed Apostle, *that the sufferings of this present time, are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.*

They doubted not, but Heaven was worth infinitely more than they were able to do or suffer for it; and that it was a very advantageous bargain, to purchase eternal and incomprehensible joys with transitory pains, though ever so grievous for the time: This consideration made death itself, though in its most terrifying shapes, appear beautiful and delightful to them. Because they regarded it only as a secure passage to a better life; and though the passage was full of difficulty and terror, the blessed land beyond it presented before their eyes, a prospect so glorious and charming, as inspired them with a generous resolution to break through all difficulties, and fight to the last drop of blood to force their way to it.

Lastly, Let us consider the wonderful lives of those holy saints, whom the church honours with the title of *confessors*; who, though they spilt not their blood, nor laid down their lives to obtain the crown, yet they daily sacrificed to God their wills and inclinations; which, if well considered, will appear a sacrifice no less generous, and, in regard of its long continuation, perhaps more difficult, than what is offered with effusion of blood. For to live in the world, and be utterly dead to all worldly affections; to have all the usual inclinations of nature, and at the same time to live in a total contradiction to them, has something in it so tiresome and painful, that it is a task of a more than ordinary patience and resolution, not to be overcome or wearied by it.

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Yet, this hard task many thousands have undertaken, and gone through with it: They denied themselves whatever nature loves, and made choice of every thing that is disagreeable and painful to it: They renounced the conveniencies and diversions of cities, to pass their days in solitary caves and hideous desarts: They preferred poverty to riches; humiliations and contempt, to honours and preferments; obedience and suffering, to liberty and ease. In a word, their whole time was spent in the most laborious exercises of penance, without any further allowance of relaxation, than was absolutely necessary to support life, and prolong their painful exile.

Now, this wonderful self-denying method of these holy saints, shews plainly, what their thoughts were of the life to come, and how they undervalued this world in comparison to it; in effect, their hearts were where their treasure was laid up; and their treasure being in Heaven, they looked upon the earth with a generous disdain, rejecting all the offers it could make them, either of honours, riches, or pleasures; and accepting no other satisfaction for the present, than the hopes of a blessed eternity hereafter: So that we may justly say of them, that *having found one pearl of great price, they went and sold all they had, and bought it.* For they reserved nothing for themselves, not even the desire of any earthly goods, but with their wills made all over to God; *counting, with the Apostle, all things as dung, that they might gain Christ.*

Now, then, to draw some practical instructions from what has been said: since these holy saints were undoubtedly animated with, and directed by the spirit of God, both their judgment of things, and the example of their lives, carries

ries a very great weight, and ought to serve us as lights to walk by. First, then, we are to learn from the idea they had of Heaven, that we ought to regard it as our supreme good; that all this world is nothing to it, and consequently that any earthly thing, of whatever moment it appears to be, if it pretends to stand in competition with it, is to be postponed and sacrificed to it. And here no manner of abatement can be allowed. For whoever is not heartily convinced, that Heaven is to be preferred before all things in this world, errs in the very first principle of Christian morality, makes the whole gospel void, and shews himself to be in a criminal state.

But when we are well fixed in this great principle, and have settled a right judgment of the happy state we are to aim at, the next lesson we are to learn of the saints is, how to secure our pretensions to it; and here we are to take directions from the method of their lives. My meaning is, not that we are bound to bear up to the rigour of the penances they practised, because they are neither proportioned to the measure of every one's strength, nor consistent with all states or conditions. And the self-same practices, which are a means to sanctify some, may be a snare to others, and occasion their ruin, if undertaken by such as are not sufficiently qualified for the performance.

However, since it is impossible that means directly opposite should have a tendency to the self-same end, we conclude, that Heaven is not to be attained to, but by those who are, in some degree, within the limits of that way, in which the saints have walked; and that they, who in the method of their lives differ so far from them, as to bear no manner of resemblance with them, pretend in vain to the happy state they enjoy.

Now

Now of this number are, *first*, all those who live in a state of wilful sin; and the deeper they are engaged in it, the farther they are out of their way to Heaven: Nor can any thing secure their return to it, but an entire change. For *east* and *west* are not more opposite, than the way of these unhappy Christians are to those of the saints, which, therefore, if continued, must unavoidably bring them to everlasting perdition.

Whence it follows, *2dly*, that they who live in the practice of any unjust dealing, cannot pretend to walk in the footsteps of the saints; since these were so far from coveting their neighbours goods, that, for the most part, they even renounced those, which they might have lawfully possessed.

Thirdly, it appears, that neither they who study to pass their time in a circle of worldly pleasures, nor they who are so filled with the solitudes of this life, as to forget the concerns of the next, bear any manner of resemblance with the pattern I have proposed: For what resemblance have pleasures with mortifications, gratifying self-love with self-denials, or a total neglect of salvation, with a continual studious application to it? These are as wide from one another as things can be, and can have no relation to the same end, but must of necessity terminate in very different states.

It is therefore beyond all question, that nothing can render us in any measure, either conformable to the saints now, or happy with them hereafter, but a life of *penance*. However, that we may not be frightened with this doctrine, which is expressly taught, both by the *gospel* and the *council of Trent*, nor at a loss about the manner how to put it in practice, I dare confidently say, no man will miss of his aim in it, who will
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but constantly and uniformly comply, *first*, with the general duties of Christianity; and, *2dly*, with all the particular obligations of his respective state. For in making good both these parts of a Christian life, so many difficulties and contradictions will occur, that it is scarce possible, for any day to pass without furnishing him with such frequent occasions of denying himself, as will, of necessity, put him into the way of penance.

For, *first*, it will oblige him to a faithful observance, both of all the *commandments of God*, and *precepts of the church*: And to comply with these, nature must be frequently contradicted, and many penitential duties performed, by way of necessary means; as those of *prayer, fasting, reading, frequenting the sacraments*, avoiding the *occasions of sin*, restraining the *liberty of the senses*, and the like.

2dly, It will, over and above, oblige him to many duties particularly specified in the gospel; as doing *acts of charity, pardoning injuries, returning good for evil*, bearing patiently *all crosses* whatsoever, and many other duties; in the discharge whereof, as being very contrary to the inclinations born with us, corrupt nature cannot avoid being often mortified, and in a state of violence to itself.

Lastly, It will oblige him to deprive himself of many satisfactions, inconsistent with the discharge of the particular duties of his state, and put him daily under more or less restraint; which is always painful to the natural love we have of liberty, and the desire we have of gratifying the present humour: to say nothing of the many oppositions a Christian will meet with from abroad, occasioned by the importunate solicitations of some, and the reflections or raileries of others, which often prove a harder trial
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to him than all the difficulties arising from the inward repugnance of temper or inclination.

Now, from all these instances, it plainly follows, that a *Christian* and *penitential* life are so linked together, that they are wholly inseparable; and that to practise *Christianity in its full extent*, is to walk within the limits of that path which the saints have chalked out to us, and will certainly entitle us to a share in the happiness they possess: For though it be not by degrees so *narrow*, as what they voluntarily chose to walk in, it is still the *narrow way* of the *gospel*, that is, the way of *penance* and self-denial, as I have shewed.

And this will fully answer the frivolous pretence of those who say, *they cannot lead a penitential life, or do penance*. I grant they cannot practise the *solitude* of a *Paul* in the desert, nor the *fasts* and *watchings* of the ancient Monks, nor the *poverty* of a *Francis*. But there is a penitential life of an inferior degree, proportioned to every one's strength; and this being no other than a Christian life, as I have described it, and consisting precisely in a faithful discharge of all Christian duties, with regard to every one's respective circumstances, to pretend to be incapable of this, is pretending an incapacity to live as a Christian ought to do. It is, in effect, to throw off the sweet yoke of the gospel, and give up all pretensions to Heaven. For, he who performs not the conditions of the covenant made with God, forfeits his title to the reward; and the same causes, whatever they be, which occasion his pretended incapacity of the one, render him unworthy of the other.

However, we are bound to thank God's infinite goodness, with the deepest sense of gratitude, for having it in our power, to secure our eternal happiness upon such easy terms. For though

he

he had obliged us to all the most rigorous penances that ever have been practised, we ought undoubtedly to have paid a chearful submission to his orders; since infinite and everlasting joys cannot but be bought cheap at any rate whatever. But since, in consideration of our weakness, he requires so very little of us, comparatively to what many others have done and suffered for them, we cannot, without undervaluing his goodness, reject the easy terms demanded of us.

It is true, Heaven is not to be carried without *violence* to corrupt nature; because the very doing of our duty is a violence to it. But how chearfully should we engage in this combat, if we reflected seriously upon the infinite value of the crown to be gained by it! Oh! if we but considered daily, what it is to be for ever happy with God, all our pretended difficulties would soon vanish: But the reason why we set so low a price upon Heaven is, because we scarce ever consider it as we ought. We allow it perhaps some passing glances, but the world takes up almost all our serious thoughts: And hence it is, that our hearts, being fixed upon this present life, we are ready to sit down with the poor satisfaction it offers us, and say, in a quite contrary sense to *St. Peter*; *Lord, it is good for us to be here.*

Preserve us, O God, from this fatal blindness, and inspire us with such ardent desires of the blessed joys prepared in Heaven, that nothing in this world may obstruct our everlasting possession of them.

THE TWENTY-FIRST ENTERTAINMENT.
OF SIN.

THE UNHAPPY STATE OF A SOUL IN MORTAL
SIN.

He who loveth sin, hateth his own soul. Pſal. x. 6.

NEITHER *death* nor *judgment* would be terrible were it not for sin. Nay, death would not have entered into the world, if sin had not introduced it. It is to sin alone we owe all the scourges, wherewith God viſits us in this life. Wars, plagues, and famines, with the whole train of calamities that attend them, are but the fruits of sin. It was sin drove the angels out of Heaven, and our firſt parents out of Paradife. Finally, it is sin alone can make us forfeit our title to Heaven, and condemn us to eternal flames.

This then is the monster I am now going to deſcribe. *Malice, insolence, rebellion, and ingratitude*, are its inſeparable properties. Its *malice* appears in the miſchief it does to the ſoul, to which it is a mortal poiſon. Its *insolence, rebellion, and ingratitude*, ſtrike at God himſelf, to whom it is infinitely injurious. The miſchief it does to the ſoul, that is, the unhappy ſtate of a ſoul in mortal ſin, ſhall be the whole ſubject of this entertainment.

To repreſent the unhappy ſtate of a ſoul in mortal ſin, I need-but compare it with the happy ſtate from which ſhe falls by conſenting to it. For the large diſtance between the two extremes, compared together, will ſhew the height to which ſhe was elevated in the one, and the lowneſs into which ſhe is funk in the other; in the one ſhe will appear all beautiful, but in the other

other her beauty is destroyed, as with a noisome leper. She is covered with sores and ulcers, and turned into a hideous monster. In the one, she is not only the noblest creature upon earth, but enriched with treasures of inestimable value; and in the other, she becomes most vile and abject, is the scorn of those that were her friends, the derision of her enemies, and reduced to the utmost extremity of poverty and nakedness. Finally, we shall see her, in her happy state of grace, raised to be a rival, even of angels; *thou hast made him very little inferior to angels*; and in the unhappy state of sin, sunk into the despicable condition of brute beasts, *he has been compared to beasts, and is become like unto them*. Oh! what a dreadful change, what a frightful fall is this!

Nay, her condition is yet lower, and to be compared even with that of the infernal spirits, allowing only for her power of change, which never leaves her as long as she is united to a mortal body. For since it is a certain truth, that the same cause, applied to a proper subject, must needs produce the same effect, it follows, that as one single mortal sin, transformed the apostate angels into the hideous, and unfortunate creatures they now are, so must it also transform a soul, consenting to it, into the same state of misery and deformity: And were it as unchangeable and permanent as that of the devils, it would be the same as theirs in the sight of God; that is, the object of his everlasting hatred: Whereas now, though she be the object of God's wrath, and with reference to her sinful state, even of his hatred, yet since she has been redeemed with the precious blood of *Jesus Christ*, she is also an object of compassion to him, and capable of his mercy,
whenever

whenever she renders herself worthy of it by sincere repentance.

This is a general account of the unhappy state of a soul fallen into mortal sin; which that it may be fully made out, and set forth so as to inspire us with an abhorrence of so foul a monster, I shall endeavour to expose to your view, first, all the advantages and treasures which a soul possesses by her being in the state of grace, and then the losses she suffers, and the miseries she is plunged into, by consenting to mortal sin. But to do this clearly, it will be requisite to give you some idea of the nature and essence of *sanctifying grace*, and all the noble prerogatives and admirable effects that attend it.

When therefore we say, that a soul is in the *state of grace*, the meaning of it is, that she either has preserved, or recovered the *sanctifying grace* she received at her *baptism*, which is called the *laver of regeneration*; because whoever is washed in it, receives a *second birth*; and as he was first born of *flesh and blood*, so he is then *reborn of God*, according to the scripture language.

Now this grace which we receive in *baptism*, or recover by *penance*, is a *certain supernatural quality infused by the Holy Ghost into the soul*, or a *certain heavenly splendor*, which purifies the soul from all stains of sin, and renders her acceptable in the eyes of God. It is called *grace*, because it is a *gratuitous gift*; and it is called *sanctifying* or *justifying* grace, because it renders the person to whom it is communicated *just* and *holy*. From a *child of wrath* and everlasting perdition, he becomes the *adoptive son of God*, and from a slave of the devil, his soul becomes the beloved spouse of *Jesus Christ*.

This

This is not all; for *sanctifying grace* never comes unattended. At its first entrance into the soul by *baptism*, it introduces with it the three infused *theological virtues*, of *faith*, *hope*, and *charity*. And at its return by *penance*, it revives *faith*, which was left *dead* by sin; strengthens *hope*, which was left languishing and feeble; and restores *charity*, which was banished from the soul. *Charity* returning, brings back with it the whole treasure of *merits* acquired by our past good works. Neither does it only recover this whole precious treasure formerly laid up by works of piety, and forfeited by sin, but improves it daily by each meritorious work whereof it is the source or principle.

Hence it is, that sanctifying grace is called the *life of the soul*, because whoever is without this grace is without charity; and *he who is without charity remains in death*, says St. John. So that the soul receives proportionably the same advantages from grace, as the body receives from its union with the soul. And therefore, as the body is of itself but a deformed lump of dead flesh, incapable of beauty, strength or motion, but what the soul communicates to it; so whatever advantages of life the soul enjoys, as beauty, vigour, or power of acting, I mean, in order to eternal life, is all owing to sanctifying grace.

Grace then adorning in this manner, and enriching the soul with these precious jewels of *faith*, *hope*, and *charity*, the most beautiful of the three, makes her a dwelling-place fit for God himself to honour her with his sacred presence, according to St. John, who tells us, that *whoever remains in charity, remains in God, and God in him*; so that by grace, and charity, its inseparable attendant, man's soul is consecrated,

as it were, into a sumptuous temple, where God is pleased to inhabit, as *Christ* himself in his last sermon, says, *whoever loveth me will keep my word, and my Father will love him; and I and my Father will come and make our abode with him.* And *St. Paul*, in his epistle to the *Corinthians*, makes use of this argument to deter them from defiling their souls with sin, because they are *the temple of the living God.* And this is the first excellency or prerogative of a soul adorned with *sanctifying grace*, and the habits of *infused virtues*, which attend it.

The second is, that a person in the state of grace, is, as I have already hinted, the *adoptive son of God*: the most honourable title a rational creature is capable of. A title so noble that *St. Louis of France* preferred it, with just reason, before that of being monarch of the most flourishing kingdom of *Europe*, and bore always a greater respect for the place of his *baptism* than that of his *instalment* or *coronation.* God has but one *eternal begotten Son*, to wit, *Jesus Christ*, the *second Person* of the *blessed Trinity*: And the nearest approach a pure creature can make to it, is that of being his *adoptive son.*

The *Roman* emperors (if we may be allowed to compare great things with little ones) when they would reward any person of eminent service and merit, adopted him into the *imperial family*: And this was the most signal mark of honour and favour they could bestow upon him. What an honour is it then for a poor mortal creature, and miserable worm of the earth, to be adopted, as I may say, into the *divine family* of the most adored and blessed *Trinity*! What honour to become the adoptive son, not of a mortal man, who, though loaden with the pompous titles of this world, is himself but dust and

and ashes, but of the great God, and king of Heaven and earth! See, says St. *John*, the great bounty of the Father towards us, in that we are called and are the sons of God! He says not barely, that we are called the sons of God, but to prevent our imagining it to be a mere title without any thing real or solid in it, he tells us, that as we bear that name, so we are the sons of God.

From this prerogative of a person in the state of grace, flow immediately two others, viz. his being the brother of *Jesus Christ*, and co-heir of his eternal kingdom. The first of these is expressly taught by St. *Paul*, who in his second chapter to the *Hebrews* tells them, that since he who sanctifies, and they who are sanctified, are all of the same, that is, children of the same Father, for this reason Christ did not disdain to call them his brethren. And the second, viz. their undoubted claim to a partnership in the everlasting inheritance, is declared by the same apostle, in these words, *but if we are sons, we are likewise heirs; truly the heirs of God, and co-heirs of Jesus Christ.* O! what a blessing is this, to be entitled to eternal joys! To be the heirs of a kingdom that will never end! to have an undoubted title to a crown, of which no treachery of men, no revolutions of states, no length of time can ever dispossess us.

This therefore is the happy condition of a person in the state of grace; which I have placed before your eyes, to let you see the height from which he falls, and the profound abyss of misery into which he plunges himself, when he consents to mortal sin. For in that very instant he loses all the treasures he possessed, forfeits the blessings he enjoyed, and is divested of all the noble titles he was honoured with.

In the happy state of grace, his soul was the darling of Heaven, the object of God's love, and the joy of saints and angels; but in the moment he consents to mortal sin, he loses the friendship of Almighty God, becomes the object of his wrath, Heaven frowns upon him, and the saints and angels, espousing the quarrel of their injured master, regard him with disdain and horror. He is now no longer the *adoptive son of God*, nor *brother of Jesus Christ*, nor *heir of Heaven*. All these noble titles vanish in a moment; his name is struck out of the book of life; he is degraded and disinherited by his heavenly Father; he is disowned by *Jesus Christ*, and regarded as an enemy and traitor, as a slave of the devil, a confederate of Hell, and a child of everlasting perdition.

And what becomes now of that beautiful temple, where God delighted to dwell? what becomes of all those precious ornaments, those inestimable treasures of virtues and merits that adorned and enriched it? alas, as soon as grace is expelled, and sin enters into its place, there remains nothing but a frightful scene of desolation and horror. Imagine the destruction of some rich and noble city, surprised and plundered by a furious enemy: or represent to your thoughts the city of *Jerusalem*, as it is described by *Christ*, laid level with the ground, its inhabitants destroyed by fire and sword, and, of all its lofty palaces and towers, not one stone left upon another: represent this, I say, to your thoughts, and you will have some weak idea of what happens to a soul, when she consents to mortal sin; for as that unfortunate city, which is the figure of a sinful soul, was, as *Josephus* relates, abandoned by its *tutelar angels*, whose voices were heard in the temple to say,
let

let us depart from hence ; so the instant that sin is accomplished by a full consent of the will, the *Holy Ghost* abandons the temple of the soul, as a place polluted and prophaned, and delivers it up to become a prey to its most cruel enemy the devil, who immediately enters in as an insulting conqueror seizes upon all its precious ornaments, rifles all its treasures, destroys its very foundations, which are *sanctifying grace* and *charity* ; and to verify the figure to the full, leaves not one stone upon another, of all that noble structure, which was the delight of Heaven, and chosen by God himself for his abode.

These are the fruits of sin ; this is the *abomination of desolation*, which it brings into the living temple of God ; this the unhappy change it produces in the soul of him who consents to it. He is from that instant dead to God, and in his eyes no more than a loathsome carcase ; because deprived of grace, which gave life and beauty to the soul, was the foundation of all her happiness, and the source of all her merits, which are all rendered fruitless, like a plentiful harvest, swept away by a sudden inundation. Though he had served God as many years as old *Hilarion* : though he had given away all he possessed in alms to the poor ; though he had prayed and fasted all his life, and practised all the austerities of the ancient Fathers in the desert ; finally, though he had heaped up good works upon good works, even sufficient to entitle him to an eminent degree of glory in Heaven, one single mortal sin robs him of all, cancels all, renders all void and fruitless, and reduces him to a state of poverty and nakedness. *The virtue he has practised shall be no more remembered*, says the prophet *Ezekiel* ; his fasts are all forgot ; the treasures of alms, which he

had laid up in Heaven, turn to no account; his prayers have lost all their merit and value: Nothing remains, nothing subsists, he is bankrupt of all, and like a broken merchant, to begin again.

Oh! how deplorable is his condition! how inestimable are his losses! But to comprize them all in one single word, he has lost his God; and if he dies in that state, he has lost him for ever; which, according to the general doctrines of divines, is the greatest punishment of the damned, and surpasses all their other torments. Nay, St. *Thomas* of *Aquin* demonstrates that the loss of God, even in this life, is an evil infinitely greater than all the pains which Heaven and earth can inflict upon us. Though God should give full power to all mankind to do us all the mischief that art and malice can invent; though he should deliver us up to be tormented by evil spirits, and suffer us to fall under the greatest afflictions both of body and mind, yet our misfortune would be infinitely less than that of a sinner who loses God: because all other misfortunes are but privations of temporal goods, but the loss of God is the loss of an infinite good; and since all losses are greater or smaller evils, in proportion to the value of the goods they deprive us of, it follows that mortal sin, by which alone we lose God, is the greatest evil that can happen to us.

Hence it is no wonder that *Christ*, whose ideas of things are infinitely just and perfect, wept over *Lazarus* and the city of *Jerusalem*, and yet refused the tears of those pious women, who attended on him in his passion. For *Lazarus* was the figure of a soul dead in sin, and *Jerusalem* the type of reprobate sinners, but himself the pattern of suffering innocence. And therefore

therefore *Christ*, by weeping over them, and refusing the tears of the holy women, gave us to understand that there is but one thing in this world, *viz.* sin, which fully deserves our tears, and that a person labouring under the heaviest load of sufferings, is not so great an object of compassion, as a soul in mortal sin.

Sin therefore is an evil that justly challenges our tears. All sufferings of the body, though ever so great, are but imaginary evils, if compared with sin. *Job* on the dunghill was a happy man, because he was free from mortal sin; and a monarch on the throne, though favoured with all the blessings, and wallowing in all the pleasures of life, is infinitely unhappy, if he be in the state of mortal sin. The saints and angels in Heaven, if they were capable of sensible impressions, would weep over him; and *Jesus Christ* himself, if his state of glory could admit of grief and tears, would lament his unhappy condition. Let us then lament our sins with such true penitential tears, as may wash off their stains, and be a source of life and grace to our souls.

THE TWENTY-SECOND ENTERTAINMENT.

SIN CONSIDERED AS IT REGARDS GOD.

To thee alone have I sinned, and done evil in thy sight. Psal. l. 5.

IN the foregoing discourse I have only described sin from its effects upon the soul: But the words of my text lead me to its very essence and nature, which consist precisely in its being an offence committed against the infinite majesty of God; and though the mischief it does to the soul, be the greatest evil that can

happen to us in this world, as I have already shewn, yet this discovers but one part of its malice. But the injury it does to God, in violating his holy law, is that which constitutes its principal deformity, and shall be the subject of this entertainment.

To form a just idea of the injury we do to God by mortal sin, we must consider with a serious attention, what divines and spiritual writers teach, *viz.* that every mortal sin, whether committed by thought, word, or deed, is an offence of *infinite malice*. Neither must we understand the word *infinite*, as it is often used by the vulgar to express any thing that is very great; but we must take it in its obvious and literal meaning, and according to its full import: Because it is not the business of divines to set off Christian truths with flourishes of rhetorick, but to explain them simply and naturally, as they are in themselves: And therefore when they say, that the malice or deformity of sin is *infinite*, their meaning is, that the injury it does to God exceeds all bounds and measure; that whatever can be practised betwixt man and man holds no proportion to it; finally, that it surpasses all human comprehension: So that, though we should imagine the foulest and blackest treason man's heart is capable of; nay, though we should load it with all the most aggravating circumstances, as of *perjury* to a sovereign, of *treachery* to a bosom-friend, of *ingratitude* to a benefactor, or any thing else we can think of, to render it odious and detestable in the eyes of men, yet the malice or foulness of it in relation to the party, on whom we should suppose it practised, would bear no proportion with that of the least mortal sin, as regards Almighty God: Because what-
ever

ever passes betwixt man and man has its bounds and limits fixed, and whatever is limited, cannot enter into comparison with what is infinite and unlimited.

For this reason the *royal Prophet* seems to make no account of that part of his crime, which regards *Urias* and *Bethshabe*, and appears sensible only of the injury he had done to God, to whom he addresses himself in the forementioned remarkable words of my text, *To thee alone have I sinned, and done evil in thy sight.* He had certainly injured both *Urias* and *Bethshabe* in a very heinous manner, having murdered the one, and drawn the other into adultery. Nay, he had done evil in the eyes of men as well as before God: For he had given public scandal, and (as the prophet *Nathan* reproached him) *had made the enemies of God blaspheme his holy name.* But the heinousness of the injury he had done to God, both by the one and the other, outweighed so far the wrong he had done to men, that his repentance was wholly grounded on that motive: as appears yet farther from his answer to *Nathan*, who though he represented to him in the most pathetic manner possible, the unnatural wrong he had done his faithful servant *Urias*, received from him no other confession of his sin, but this, *peccavi Domino, I have sinned against the Lord.*

Sin therefore, to speak properly, is hateful in itself precisely as it is an *offence of God.* This constitutes its essential deformity and malice: And even those sins which regard our neighbour immediately, as *calumny, detraction, murder, adultery, theft,* and the like, derive their whole enormity from their opposition to the *eternal law* established by God; and since the majesty of God, who is injured and dishonoured by the

violation of his holy law, is *infinite*, hence all divines conclude, that the malice of sin is also *infinite*: And this they demonstrate by this unanswerable proof; *viz.* because as honour takes, its degree of value from him who pays it, so the dishonour of an offence or affront, is measured from the dignity of character of him who receives it.

This is one of those truths that carry self-evidence with them, and are clearest in their own light: so that to go about to prove them, is like setting up a candle to see the sun by: We all know, by the light of natural reason, that to shew a contempt of a *superior*, is a greater offence than if he were our *equal* or *inferior*. That to affront a *sovereign prince* is a more heinous crime, than if we did the same thing to a private man: In a word, that it is a greater indignity to injure and abuse a *parent, friend, or benefactor*, than if he were a person that has no connection with us. Now, what is it that makes all this appear so evident, but the natural notion all men have, that the grievousness of an offence falls or rises according to the dignity or character of the party offended? So that the greater his dignity or character is, the greater also in proportion is an offence committed against him: The consequence whereof is, that since the majesty of God is both *infinite* in itself, and infinitely exalted above his creatures, the enormity of an offence committed against him is also infinite.

Nay, we may say, that as God is infinite, not only in his nature and essence, but in all his attributes and perfections, so there is a kind of infinity of malice implied, not only in sin itself, that is, precisely as it is a *violation of God's law*, which is its proper definition, but in all its circumstances

cumstances and properties. So that as the *majesty*, the *goodness*, *justice*, *power*, and *wisdom* of God are infinite, so the *disobedience*, *ingratitude*, *injustice*, *insolence* and *folly*, which attend the violation of his holy law, are all crimes, that carry with them an infinite deformity, because each is directly opposite to some attribute that is infinitely perfect.

Hence all sinners are guilty of an *infinite ingratitude*, because they offend a God, who is *infinitely good* and bountiful. They commit an *infinite injustice* and *extravagance* in transgressing the law of God, who is *infinitely just and wise*. Their *presumption* is also infinite, in rebelling against an *infinite power and majesty*. In a word, there appears something so excessively monstrous in every circumstance of mortal sin, as neither thoughts can distinctly represent, nor words express. The *rebellion* of a poor creature against the King of Heaven and earth, his *insolence*, in daring to disobey God's holy law, his barefaced *contempt* of him, in renouncing his friendship for some interest or pleasure; finally, his *insensibility* of so many benefits already received, and blessings still in store for him, are every one, in their kind, of so black a nature, that though, upon reflection, we have a kind of confused idea of something that is very foul and monstrous, yet we are conscious to ourselves that not only our ideas come infinitely short of the thing itself, but that we even want words to express our imperfect ideas of it.

But to proceed now to a second proof, made use of by divines to demonstrate this truth: It is certain that God, who is infinitely *just* and *merciful*, and more inclined, as I may say, to acts of *mercy* than *justice*, cannot demand a satisfaction surpassing the grievousness of an offence committed

committed against him. *Mercy* and *goodness* may indeed cancel a whole debt *gratis*, or remit a part of it; but *justice* can never exact more than the full payment of it: And therefore, whatever satisfaction God can demand, is, at the highest, but equal to the injury he has received. Judge then of the nature of sin; judge of its malice and enormity; judge of the injury and dishonour it does to God, from the reparation or satisfaction he has demanded, and has effectually been made for it; I mean the humiliations and sufferings of *Jesus Christ*: For, as this is an instance of the most rigid justice that ever was practised since the creation of the world, and surpasses infinitely all the severities, by which God has ever manifested his hatred to sin, so it suffices alone to demonstrate its foulness and enormity.

However, that it may be rightly understood, you must not imagine, as if I laid any stress upon, or drew any argument from the greatness of our Saviour's humiliations and sufferings, considered barely in themselves. They were doubtless very great, even from the moment of his conception, to the last gasp on the cross. But how great soever they were, nay, though they had been far greater in themselves, and all offered up to satisfy the divine justice, yet if they had been undergone by any person of a rank inferior to that of *Jesus Christ*, they would have been ineffectual, nay, infinitely disproportioned to the satisfaction which God required. Nay, though the highest *seraphin* in heaven had offered himself to become man, and suffered all the torments God's wrath could inflict upon him, yet all this had been insufficient; the whole debt had remained uncanceled, and the
hand-

hand-writing, that appeared against us, would have stood in full force.

The reason is, because God demanded nothing less than an equality of justice or *condign satisfaction*, as divines call it, that is, an atonement answerable to the injury that had been done to his infinite majesty; or, to speak more plainly, a reparation of honour equal to the affront he had received by the disobedience of our first parents.

Now it is evident, that no pure creature, though ever so excellent, was capable of making any such reparation. For if any pure creature had been capable of it, then God had been unjust in exacting infinitely more than was due to him; that is in exacting that this reparation should be made by no other than the person of his *only Son*, whose dignity being infinite, gave an infinite value to every thing he did or suffered. And it is precisely from this, I mean the infinite dignity of *Christ's* sacred person, that we must make an estimate of the *price* that was paid down, and by consequence of the *debt* that was cancelled by it. Every action of *Jesus Christ* was of an infinite value. His descending to become man, his perfect obedience in all things to the will of his Father, and offering himself to him as a sacrifice of expiation, were all infinite humiliations, by which he paid to God an infinite honour; and since the divine justice, demanded this of him, for reparation of the affront he had received, it follows, that the debt which was owing could not be fully discharged, nor the *hand-writing that was against us* fully cancelled upon any other terms; and that by consequence, as God was *infinitely honoured* by the obedience and humiliation of his Son, who was equal to him in all things, so he had been
infinitely

infinitely dishonoured by the pride and disobedience of our first parents.

Thus we see the malice and enormity of mortal sin; it is the greatest evil that can befall the soul, and it is infinitely injurious to Almighty God. How comes it then that we detest not this infernal monster with the greatest hatred our hearts are capable of! How comes it that we fly not from it, as from the face of a venomous serpent, that would sting us to death! Nay, how comes it that we admit it so easily into our hearts, and when we are so unhappy as to have yielded to it, we shew so little concern to be delivered from it! It is not to be doubted indeed, but that the corruption of man's nature, the fuel of sin we carry about us, and the violence of temptations, are in a great measure the source of this fatal blindness: However, it is no less certain, that the fuel of sin would be very much weakened and the violence of temptations very much abated, if we had but a strong faith and lively sense of the truths I have enlarged upon; because this would inspire us with such a hatred of sin, as would in a great degree counterbalance our natural proneness to it.

If then we made it our daily practice, or at least as often as we prepare ourselves for the *sacrament of penance*, to reflect seriously upon the malice and enormity of mortal sin, it is to be hoped, that by degrees it would work this effect upon us, and lay in us so deep a foundation of hatred and detestation of it, as would arm us against the most violent assaults of corrupt nature: The reason is clear; because it would form in us a strong conviction, that sin is the greatest evil that can befall us; and since all evils, represented as such, are objects which we cannot but hate and fear, this conviction
would

would insensibly make at least the same impression upon us, and work us into an equal hatred of fear and sin, as we usually have of any considerable temporal evil, when the idea of it is lively represented to our thoughts. Now, if sin were but as much feared and hated, as those things which all reasonable men regard as great evils, it is not to be doubted but relapses, even into the most secret sins, would become as rare as those crimes which are attended with infamy and ruin in this world.

Let us suppose God had ordered things so, that every sin, though ever so secretly committed, should be punished upon the spot, with some very violent pain; equal, for example, to that of the rack, or being burnt alive; I ask whether, in that case, it be probable that any temptation or allurements would be strong enough to overcome us? surely no: For it appears more rational to judge, that in the case supposed, even the most violent temptations would be rejected with horror; the reason is, because the fear of so great an evil would be a powerful counterpoise, and plead more effectually for our resisting, than corrupt nature for our yielding to them. In like manner therefore, if we had a strong and lively apprehension of the evil of sin, if we were practically convinced that it is the greatest evil that can happen to us, as it most undoubtedly is, this would create in us so great a fear and detestation of it, that the violence of temptations, which is now the usual apology for relapses, would meet a check and counterpoise equal to that in the case supposed, and instead of drawing us into any sinful consent, only furnish us with an occasion to encrease our merit.

Let

Let us therefore, consider seriously what sin is; let us consider it over and over again, that it may make a sensible impression upon us: Let us consider that it is the enemy of God and our souls; that it is a mortal poison, which deprives us in a moment of that life, which ought to be most precious to us; that it robs us of the love and friendship of Almighty God, which is a treasure of infinite value: that, finally, it makes us slaves of the devil, and if death surprises us in that state, renders us eternally unhappy. And are not these most powerful inducements to hate and detest it?

However, let us not stop here, but from the consideration of the dreadful evils we fall into by consenting to mortal sin, let us pass on to consider how grievously displeasing it is to Almighty God. Let us consider, that every mortal sin is an offence of *infinite malice*, because committed against an *infinite majesty*, and that God is infinitely dishonoured by it: let us consider, that the *apostate angels* were doomed to everlasting flames for one mortal sin; finally, that one mortal sin excluded *Adam*, and his whole posterity, from the kingdom of God; and that the gates of Heaven would have been eternally shut against us, had not the *Son of God* himself become a victim of reconciliation, and made atonement to God for the injury he had received. Oh! what a dreadful offence is that which nothing less than the *blood of Jesus Christ* can atone for! How immense is the debt of sin, for which nothing but an infinite treasure can satisfy!

This consideration carries the greatest weight with it, and gives us the clearest and fullest idea of the enormity of mortal sin; which therefore is the most solid motive to ground our repentance upon, whenever we prepare ourselves for the sacrament

sacrament of penance : because this motive, if well considered, will inspire us with a hatred of sin in itself ; that is, precisely as it is *an offence of God* : and whoever hates sin, because God is offended with it, cannot but have that *filial love* in his heart, which is the best pledge of his reconciliation to him ; and then our repentance will be like that of the *royal prophet*, expressed in those few words, *I have sinned against the Lord* ; which was so acceptable to God, that *Nathan* was immediately inspired to pronounce his pardon ; and so effectual in itself, that we do not read it was ever followed by any relapse, at least into any sin of the same kind. If therefore our repentance be grounded upon the same solid motive, the pardon of our sins will be no less sure, and our amendment as effectual, if by repeated considerations we labour to work ourselves into a hatred of sin, equal to that of the *royal prophet* ; whereof he has left us this authentic declaration in his 118th Psalm, *I have hated and abominated sin, but thy law have I loved.*

THE TWENTY-THIRD ENTERTAINMENT.

OF THE AGGRAVATIONS THAT ATTEND
RELAPSES INTO MORTAL SIN.

The last state of that man is worse than the first.
Luke xi. 26.

THE parable whereof these words are the close, is thus set forth by St. Luke. *When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest, and finding none, he saith, I will return into my house whence I came out ; and when he cometh, he findeth it swept and garnished. Then goeth he and taketh to him seven other spirits, more wicked than himself, and they enter in, and dwell*

dwell there, and the last state of that man is worse than the first.

The main drift of this parable, is to represent two important truths: *First*; that when a person is delivered from the bondage of sin by *baptism*, or the sacrament of *penance*, the devil is indefatigable, in seeking to replunge him into his former state; and the *second*, that the condition of a person thus relapsing, is worse than it was before his former deliverance from sin.

There is, however, a large difference between accidental falls, and a constant custom of relapsing. The former may justly be attributed to human weakness, but the latter deserves a much harsher censure; for it betrays an habitual bent of the heart, and is usually the fruit of a large degree of insensibility, attended with a supine neglect, of the means necessary to subdue or weaken that inclination, which is the principal root of the relapses I speak of.

Now, it is of persons under these circumstances we must chiefly understand the words of Christ, saying, *that their last state is worse than the first.* Which may be fully made out, *first*, from the *aggravations* inseparable from such relapses, and *secondly*, from the mischiefs a sinner draws upon himself, by a custom of relapsing. I shall only speak of the first in this entertainment.

The principal design of this discourse is to shew, that an habitual sinner becomes more criminal, and by consequence more injurious to God, every time he multiplies his relapses, than he was when he received last the benefit of absolution, I mean, however, if all other circumstances be equal. For if it is not to be questioned, but the sin or sins that were the subject of his preceding confession may be clogged with
such

such circumstances, as far outweigh the aggravations of relapse. Neither can it be doubted, but there may be grains of allowance, for extraordinary and unforeseen occasions, or temptations more violent and lasting than usual. These being circumstances, which lessen the grievousness of any sin, and may serve as a counterpoise to such aggravations, as would otherwise weigh down the balance, and charge it with a heavier guilt.

I therefore speak of persons, who, without any notable change of circumstances, make a custom of returning to their vomit, and are in a kind of a regular tract of confessing and relapsing, as if they only meant to wash themselves, to appear clean upon extraordinary days, and when those are over, to wallow again in the mire, and defile themselves as much as ever. Now of these, I say, what *Christ* pronounced of the man, into whom the evil spirit re-entered after he had been once chased out, *viz. that their latter state is worse than their former*, and that by every relapse they contract a new addition of guilt, to what they stood charged with before the last pardon of their sins. The reason hereof is, *first*, because every relapse implies a greater contempt of God; *secondly*, because it gives a fresh aggravation to their former *treachery*; and, *thirdly*, because it renders them guilty of a blacker *ingratitude*. I shall speak briefly of each.

First, then, as to the aggravation of *contempt*. To make myself rightly understood, I must first shew how every mortal sin implies a *contempt* of God, as a general circumstance inseparable from it. You must therefore know, that there is a *speculative* contempt, and a *practical* one. The former is in the *understanding* or *judgment*; the other

other in the *heart* or *will*. And though the latter be usually the effect of the former, they are not so inseparably connected, but the one may be without the other. *Speculative contempt* is nothing else but a mean idea conceived of any thing or person, and is always grounded upon some real or supposed effect. But *practical contempt* is an absolute and positive determination of the will, postponing or rejecting any thing for the love of something else, which it prefers before it. And I call it a *practical contempt*, because it is the immediate result of our practical judgment, which, deliberating and comparing, determines the will to that choice.

Now it is manifest, no Christian, though ever so completely wicked in this practice, can ever be guilty of a speculative contempt of God; because, whoever but believes there is a God, must of necessity believe him to be infinitely perfect; and it is impossible to have a mean idea of what we believe to be infinite in all perfections; or condemn him in our speculative judgments, in whom we cannot so much as apprehend the least defect. Hence it comes to pass, that libertines themselves will sometimes speak with as much respect of Almighty God, as the most pious Christians; and they speak but what they really think; because their belief is sound, and their speculative judgment free from error. But their guilt consists in renouncing in *fact*, what they believe in *speculation*, and profess in words. Their *faith* is dead, and has no influence upon their actions. For though they have the knowledge of God, yet, as St. Paul says, *they glory him not, but vanish away in their thoughts*. So that notwithstanding, the high and noble ideas they have of God's infinite perfections, which we may properly call a *speculative esteem*, they are
guilty

guilty of a *practical contempt* of him in every sin they commit; because in every deliberate sin, they effectually postpone and reject his friendship, for the love of some interest or pleasure, which they prefer before him.

This will appear evident, if we but consider the essential opposition *grace* has to *sin*, and their inconsistency with each other. The word of God compares them to *light* and *darkness*; because as these can never be joined together in the same subject, so neither can *sin* and *grace* meet in the same soul. Grace destroys sin, and sin expels grace at the very moment it is consented to. So that upon the proposal of any temptation, the point in question in effect is this, whether the party concerned will resolve to prefer God's grace and friendship, or the pleasure of the sin to which he is tempted. For he cannot pretend to them both at once, but he must renounce either the one or the other. It is true, it cannot be doubted, but the most profligate sinner upon earth, would rather chuse to join them both together: For no man can become guilty of such an extravagant contempt of God, but that he would rather have his friendship, than be without it; if the keeping of it were to cost him nothing: but this being impossible, he must make a peremptory choice; and either *grace* or *sin* must preponderate, with an absolute exclusion of the other.

Hence it is observable, that before a mortal sin is consented to, there passes a kind of verbal debate within the soul, in which the understanding deliberates what to prefer, and what to postpone; conscience pleading on the one hand, and corrupt nature soliciting on the other; till the judgment blinded with passion, and eager desire of a present satisfaction, determines the will

will to prefer what it ought to reject, and reject what it ought to prefer. And does not this preposterous and extravagant choice, made with full knowledge and deliberation, imply a manifest contempt of God? Does not a sinner, in preferring a present satisfaction, as good as declare, that whatever God's friendship may be worth in itself, yet for his own part, he thinks it not worth his keeping it, with the trouble of denying himself that satisfaction? The case admits of no dispute. For there is no argument like matter of fact. Nor can there be a more substantial proof of our contempt of any thing, than our parting with it upon very easy terms, especially when it is done with full thought and reflection.

This therefore is the general circumstance of *contempt*, imbibed in every mortal sin. But this circumstance, as I have undertaken to shew, is very much aggravated in relapses, especially if they be frequent: *First*, because to do a thing often, shews a kind of settled determination to it; which, as it adds to the lustre and merit of virtue, so it must needs give an aggravation to sin, and all the circumstances that attend it. *2dly*, Because in all offences, of what kind soever, even against men, the second transgression is always esteemed worse than the first, and the third worse than the second, and so forward; the latter being still worse than the former, and heightening the quality of the offence, as it encreases the number. Now, one of the reasons hereof doubtless is, because the repeating an offence, betrays a greater *contempt* of the party offended, and by consequence, the oftener it is repeated; the more avowed and barefaced is the contempt. It therefore stands with reason, that the same rule should hold in
reference

reference to Almighty God, as in the case between man and man. For if he who makes a custom of affronting a man, be reasonably supposed to have a greater contempt of him, than he who does it but once or seldom, we cannot judge otherwise of a sinner, who makes a kind of practice of offending Almighty God, by renouncing his sacred friendship, as often as the devil and his passions offer him any thing in exchange for it.

This made *Tertullian* say, that a sinner, by returning to his vomit, revokes, as it were, his former repentance, and makes a kind of atonement for it to the Devil. Not that he has any such thing in his *speculative* thoughts, but his actions imply it, and are a retraction, in *fact*, whereby he now disclaims God's friendship, dissolves the covenant made with him, and (as the scripture terms it) *makes a league with Hell*; by virtue whereof, he subjects himself to the devil, and owns him for his lord and master.

Hence follows the aggravation of the second general circumstance of sin, *viz.* of *treachery*, which is doubtless increased in every relapse. The reason is, because every relapse is a new *breach of faith*; and a breach of faith, after many repeated engagements to the contrary, is a treachery of a much fouler nature than without that circumstance. To make this clear, I must observe to you, that the *sacrament of penance* is a kind of second *baptism*: And as in baptism we make a solemn league and covenant with Almighty God, so when this is broke by mortal sin, we renew it again by virtue of the *sacrament of penance*. Now, in all leagues and covenants, there are certain conditions agreed to on both sides. The conditions on the part of God, when we make our peace with him, are to forgive

give us our sins past, and restore us to his holy grace, with all the advantages belonging to it. The principal conditions on the part of the penitent, are to do penance for his sins, and offend God no more. Upon these terms he is again received into favour.

Hence it plainly follows, that every reconciliation is attended with a fresh engagement of fidelity on the part of the penitent; and that as often as he has recourse to the sacrament of penance, so often he renews his covenant with God, and gives him fresh assurances of fidelity to him for the future. As for instance, he who has been pardoned twenty times, lies under the obligation of twenty several contracts or engagements; and every one of these, besides his first baptismal vows, stands good for ever, and obliges him to a perpetual fidelity; because they are not made for a limited time, but for life; nor does a penitent promise not to sin again for a week, month, or year, but never to offend God any more.

Now, from all these promises, it manifestly follows, that every relapse is a breach of all the covenants, that have ever passed between Almighty God and the sinner; as being directly contrary to the conditions stipulated, and agreed upon in every one of them, from the first to the last: And by consequence, the last relapse cannot but imply a higher degree of *perfidiousness* than any of the former; because it always is a violation of one solemn league, more than the preceding one, and breaks at once through all the sacred ties of fidelity, that have ever engaged him to God, throughout the whole course of his life.

Thus, then, you see how the general circumstance of *treachery* is aggravated by every relapse; and the same must be said, of that of *ingratitude*;

ingratitude; which, as it is implied in every sin, so it receives an aggravation, from every relapse we become guilty of, especially after having obtained from God's pure mercy, the full discharge and pardon of our former sins. This is evident, because the more and greater blessings we receive from the infinite bounty of God, the more we are indebted to him; and the more we are indebted to him, the more ungrateful we are in offending him. Now of all blessings in this life, the pardon of our sins is one of the highest value; because it delivers us from the power and slavery of the devil, restores us to the life of grace, and puts us again into full possession of the title we had forfeited to eternal bliss:

Oh! what treasures are these! What inestimable blessings! and how great then is the bounty and mercy that bestows them! Nothing truly can equal it in any degree, but the ingratitude of a sinner, who makes a custom of abusing the author of it. A subject that rebels against his sovereign, after he has been pardoned by him though but once or twice, for the same crime, is looked upon as a monster of ingratitude, and detested as such by all men of worth and honour. What name then can we find, to express the ingratitude a sinner is guilty of, who sticks not to rebel against Almighty God, after the many reiterated pardons obtained of him, besides other numberless blessings over and above? But though no words can express the nature of his crime, the comparison may at least help us to form some idea of it; and plainly shews, that, though the voice of ingratitude be one of the basest qualities, even between man and man, yet the ingratitude of a sinner, returning again to his vomit, after he has been so often the object of God's mercy, has something of foulness in

it, which infinitely surpasses whatever can be practised in that kind, by one man in relation to another.

I shall now conclude, with drawing this one consequence, from the consideration I have enlarged upon, *viz.* that, since the frequent relapses of habitual sinners, are so extremely injurious to the divine majesty and goodness, as I have justly represented them to be, it is no wonder they should often terminate, either in a *final impenitence*, or, at the best, in a *death-bed repentance*, which is the last and worst chance a sinner can have for his soul. That the matter of fact is so, is but too manifest from experience; and, in effect, is but what the *Holy Ghost* has menaced by the mouth of *St. Paul*, who writes thus to the *Galatians*, chap. vii. *Be not deceived, God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap; for he that soweth in the flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth in the spirit, shall of the spirit reap life everlasting.* This doctrine of *St. Paul*, is grounded on this undoubted maxim in morality, *viz.* that God usually covers the effects, both of his judgments and mercies, under the operations of natural causes. Now, there is almost as natural a connection between the manner of men's lives, and their deaths, as there is between the nature of any *seed*, and its *fruit*. A long series of good works, is the natural seed of a happy death; and a long practice of vice tends as naturally to an unhappy one. *Whatsoever a man soweth, that also shall he reap.*

But though there were no natural connection between them, it is enough, that God has promised the one, as the proper reward of virtue, and threatened the other, as the just punishment of sin. He promises incomprehensible rewards
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to spur us on to virtue, and he threatens endless evils to deter us from sin : And, he will most certainly make good his promises, by crowning a good life with a happy death ; so nothing but a groundless and insupportable presumption, can make men flatter themselves, that the practice of vice will terminate in the reward of virtue ; and that God, who is faithful to his word, will favour those with the *death of the just*, who have lived the lives, and walked in the paths of the wicked.

THE TWENTY-FOURTH ENTERTAINMENT.

THE MISCHIEFS A SINNER DRAWS ON HIMSELF
BY A CUSTOM OF RELAPSES.

And the last state of that man is worse than the first.
Luke xi. 26.

THE aggravations inseparable from a custom of relapses, has been fully demonstrated in my last discourse, wherein I have shewed plainly, that *the last state of a relapsing sinner is worse than the first* ; which, however, is not only true in relation to Almighty God, whose displeasure he incurs more grievously than before ; but also in relation to his own soul, whose evils are gradually increased by it ; as will appear from the mischiefs he draws on himself by every relapse, as shall be shewn in this entertainment.

The first mischief that attends a custom of relapsing, is a continual uneasiness, and disquiet of conscience. Experience suffices to convince us, how great an evil this is ; I mean, to one who is not utterly hardened in sin : For as the greatest blessing in this life is an easy mind, grounded upon a good conscience, so there can be no real happiness without it. The repose of a good conscience is as a *continual feast*, and the

torment of a troubled one, labouring under the guilt of mortal sin, is, to the soul, much what the rack is to the body. It allows her no rest, disquiets her night and day, and fours all the pleasures of life: Nay, let a man be otherwise ever so happy, and enjoy all the advantages of health, wealth, friends, or any thing the world can bestow upon him, he is effectually miserable, under the stings and lashes of a bad conscience.

The heathens themselves, were so sensible of this truth, that they looked upon the torment of a guilty conscience, as one of the heaviest punishments in this world; and therefore, represented it figuratively, by things of which they had the greatest horror, as the gnawing of vipers, the haunting of frightful spectres, the lashes of the furies, and the like.

Now, if this be the inseparable punishment of sin in general, at least to a soul not utterly lost to all sense of God, and another world, it is, doubtless, much worse in the case of relapses; because, as the guilt is greater, so the sting that follows it must also be sharper, and the party concerned, more disquieted and uneasy under it. And indeed, the reasons he has to be uneasy under it, are but too many, and too well grounded. First, the melancholy reflection of having, for a momentary pleasure, lost that solid peace of mind he enjoyed before, frets and galls him to the very quick: Then the thought of having, by his last treason and ingratitude, provoked God's anger more than ever, disturbs him with the terror of his judgments. To this is added, the confusion he is under of again confessing his sins, which the devil's malice often heightens to an excessive degree, either to throw him into some desperate course, or at least to keep him in his power, by the shame of lay-
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ing open the fresh ulcer of his soul, and imploring again the mercy he has so lately abused.

Add to this, the mortifying thought that he is now to begin again, as having, by his relapse, lost all the fruit of his past labours, and not only forfeited the favour and friendship of Almighty God, but the merits of all the good works he has ever practised, which are now cancelled, and of no more benefit to him, than if they had never been performed. This is the general doctrine of divines, grounded upon the word of God, who speaks thus by the mouth of *Ezekiel*; *If the just man, says he, withdraws himself from his justice, to return to his former iniquity, I will forget all the good he has done.* And the wise man says upon this subject, *What does it avail a man, who has touched a dead body, to have washed himself, if he again defiles himself, and touches it?*

These are some reasons of that uneasiness and disquiet of conscience, which a custom of relapsing brings with it. But I take the principal one to be the just ground it gives of suspecting the validity of preceding confessions: For, though I have no reason to think myself inclined to represent things worse than they really are, yet I cannot, without flattery, assure relapsing sinners, that they need not trouble themselves about the validity of their past confessions, unless they can first assure me that, to the best of their knowledge, whenever they confessed their sins, they always resolved seriously, both to avoid the occasions of their relapses, and use serious endeavours to overcome the difficulties they labour under; for, whoever is not conscious to himself, of ever having failed in either of those two points, (supposing always, that no fraud has been used in his confessions)

may, notwithstanding his relapses, be falsely advised, not to be over-solicitous about what is past, but rather take care of what is to come, by often repeating the same good purposes, and doing his best endeavours to put them faithfully in practice.

But if, on the contrary, any one's conscience reproaches him, that he either has not always seriously resolved to avoid the occasions of sin, or has not proposed to take due measures, for the overcoming of his habits, such an one has all the reason in the world to be very uneasy, about the validity of his past confessions; and to tell him otherwise, would be to flatter him into a false security, and encourage him to go on quietly in the way of perdition: The reason is plain, because *contrition*, which is an essential part of *penance*, and implies a serious purpose of amendment, as well as sorrow for sins past, is defective without the two fore-mentioned resolutions; and the defect of any one essential part, suffices to make the whole confession null. I add, moreover, that when relapsing grows into a habit or custom, there is generally ground enough to suspect, that some defect in the repentance, is the real occasion of it; and it is to be feared, that whoever is under this unhappy circumstance, if he will but look back into the method of his past confessions, and examine them impartially, will, for the most part, discover defects enough to find himself under a necessity of being as solicitous, to make good what is past, as careful to avoid all causes of the like for the future.

But there remains yet another mischief inseparable from a custom of relapsing, *viz.* that the habit of it, and, by consequence, the difficulty of amendment, is usually increased by every

every relapse. Now this increase of difficulty proceeds from several causes: *First*, From the withdrawing of the divine Spirit; who, as he pours himself liberally on those that are careful to preserve his holy grace, enlightening their understanding, strengthening their wills, inflaming their affections, and visiting them with a thousand pious motions and inspirations; so he withdraws himself, with all these favours, from those who know not how to set a true value upon this precious treasure, but are ready to part with it for every sinful pleasure that courts their inclinations: From these, I say, he withdraws himself, by the same steps and degrees, as they depart from the way of God's commandments; and forbears communicating those extraordinary lights and special graces, without which the ordinary ones are, for the most part, rendered fruitless, through the corruption of their hearts, caused by the strong inclination to sin on the one hand, and the habit they have contracted of resisting God's inspirations on the other.

Whence follows, of course, the second cause, that increases the difficulty of their return to God; to wit, the new addition of power the devil gets over them, by every sin they relapse into: For since every act of mortal sin banishes God from the soul, and puts the devil in possession of it; because there is no middle or vacancy in the soul, but either *God* or *Satan* must be master of it; it follows, that the frequency of such acts, as it sets a sinner at a great distance from God, and the influences of his holy grace, so, at the same time, it gives the devil an opportunity to fortify himself more strongly; the consequence whereof can be no other, than the increasing still more and more, the difficulty

of his return to God. And since one relapse naturally draws on another, the frequent multiplying of them, cannot but at length establish the dominion of the devil over him, in such a manner, that it will become at length the work of nothing less than a very extraordinary grace, to rescue him out of his power.

This leads me to a third cause, that renders the recovery of a relapsing sinner still more and more difficult, to wit, the natural increase and growth of habits by a frequency of their acts. This is evident from experience, even in the progress of virtuous habits, or such as are indifferent in themselves; for the oftener we repeat their acts, the deeper they take root; and there is no way of attaining to a proficiency in any of them, but by practice, that is, a frequent repetition of their proper acts. But vicious habits have a great advantage over these, and are of a much quicker growth; because corrupt nature is, as it were, their proper and natural soil: They are like weeds that grow wild, and come up of themselves: Nay, there even needs a great deal of care and pains to destroy them: But if, instead of this, we also cultivate and cherish them, if the soil be improved, and prepared for them, over and above, we may easily guess how quick they will grow upon us.

However, thus far is certain, that every time we yield to any vicious habit, we become proner to yield to it again; we make nature more pliable to all its impressions; we give a new strength to it, and make it sink deeper than before. Our passions are like a head-strong mob, the more we gratify them in their unreasonable demands, the more we encourage them to rebel; and the only way to bring them to terms

terms of reason, is to keep them under a severe discipline. Was there ever any man subject to the tyranny of any passion, but must own, that the beginning of his misfortune was dated from the first time he yielded to it? And that the gradual increase of its power over him, was also wholly owing to the very same cause; which, as often as it was repeated, still produced the same effect, and gave a new addition of strength to the growing evil? Must he not own, that whenever he indulged that passion, he found it more rebellious afterwards? And when he flattered himself, he would but gratify it for the present, he only set it a craving more eagerly, and cut out work for a more difficult combat than before?

It is therefore evident, that the tyranny of sin increases with sinning, and that the oftener we yield, the more we desire to yield, and become less able to resist: Nay, we may yield so long, till it becomes in a manner natural, and our power of resisting so weak, that we are scarce sensible that we have any. I should be afraid to say this, had I not *St. Austin's* authority for it, whose words upon this subject are quoted by every body. *Ex voluntate perversa facta est libido, & dum servitur libidini facta est consuetudo; & dum consuetudini non resistitur, facta est necessitas.* Here we have all the principal steps and degrees of a growing habit, described by this saint. His words may be translated thus: *The will, not governed, turns to an eager desire of sin, and by our gratifying this desire, it is formed into a habit, and a habit not resisted becomes a necessity.* *St. Isidore* expresses the same in these terms: *Actio consuetudinem parit consuetudo necessitatem, necessitas mortem*, that is to say, *Acts produce a habit, a habit begets a necessity,*

necessity, and necessity terminates in death, meaning the eternal death of the soul.

It is true, I cannot but think that both these fathers are to be understood in a qualified sense, and not of an *absolute and irresistible necessity*. For, where there is no power to resist, there can be no liberty, and without liberty there is no sin, because sin is a *free and voluntary transgression* against the law of God. However, their words import a violent bent, and proneness of nature, as seems to approach very near to an irresistible necessity in all its *effects*. And this is what the scripture calls the *servitude or slavery* of sin. Because as a slave is at his master's beck, to obey all his orders, though ever so extravagant; so a person, under these unhappy circumstances, is so perfectly subject to the tyranny of his prevailing passion, that he scarce knows what it is to resist, and seems rather hurried on, or thrust forward, like an engine, than to act freely, when objects, which are agreeable to that inclination, and accustomed to prevail upon it, present themselves.

Oh! how dangerous and deplorable is the state of a sinner reduced to such a servitude! It is true, his condition is not desperate, because, as St. *Austin* says, *no wound is incurable to an omnipotent physician*; and as long as there is life, there is hope. Nay, he is bound to do all he can to work himself out of it; particularly, by an humble and hearty prayer, by reading pious books, mortifying his senses, and avoiding all occasions of the sin he is inclined to. However, we cannot but consider him, as one reduced to a most dangerous state. And therefore, since every sin we commit, brings us still nearer and nearer to this unhappy state, because, by every sin the power of sin is encreased,
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and the power of resisting is diminished; it follows evidently, that by every relapse, the recovery of a sinner becomes more difficult than it was before, and that the oftener he falls, the harder it is for him to rise again. And so his difficulties go on increasing, till, by multiplying relapses, he brings himself to the condition I have described, which, as St. *Isidore* tells us, usually *terminates in death*, by closing all up, with the last fruits of sin in this life, I mean, *despair*, and *final impenitence*.

Thus we see the nature, and dangerous consequences of relapses; that is, the injury they do to God on the one hand, and the mischiefs they bring with them on the other. In my last discourse, I laid before you the bare-faced *contempt* of God, the *treachery* and *ingratitude* which those, who continue in the practice of them, are guilty of: But since it usually happens, that persons accustomed to sin, are but little affected with considerations of this nature, self-interest ought at least to open their eyes, and make them sensible of the unhappy state they live in: For what content or satisfaction can they enjoy? What ease can they have under the weight, and continual reproaches of a guilty conscience? Are not their very pleasures imbittered by it? Have they any thing to comfort them in their afflictions? Then again, what fears and agonies do they suffer? Are they not disturbed with every danger that threatens them? Nay, often with the mere imagination of it? Is not the very thought of death, as bitter almost as death itself, with the apprehension of their being surprised by it, in a state in which they know themselves wholly unprovided for it?

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These certainly are the usual attendants, this is the daily portion of a guilty conscience. And truly nothing is a greater evidence of the power of sin, than that all the miseries it makes men suffer, even in this life, are not sufficient to move them, to a generous resolution to throw off its yoke. But will they not consider, that the longer they continue subject to it, the more they increase their slavery? Will they not consider, that every sin they commit, is the addition of a new and strong link to the chain that holds them in bondage; and that by adding sin to sin, they may at length strengthen their fetters to such a degree, as to put it in a great measure out of their power to break loose from them?

I say, *in a great measure*, to express the difficulty of it. For though it be true that a sinner cannot absolutely lose the power of returning to God, during the course of this life; yet this power may, by a long custom of sinning, be so cramped and weakened, and his vicious habits so strengthened, that without an extraordinary grace to enable him, which he has no reason to presume upon, he will never have the courage and resolution to break through all the difficulties into which he has thrown himself; and experience will too late convince him, that it is much easier to conquer a passion in the beginning, than even to struggle heartily with it, when it is once fortified by habit and custom.

I only wish the experiment may never be tried; and conclude with our Saviour's advice to the cripple cured by him, *Sin now no more, lest something worse befall thee.*

THE

THE TWENTY-FIFTH ENTERTAINMENT.

OF VENIAL SIN.

He who contemneth little things, shall fall by degrees. Eccl. xix. 1.

HAVING, in the foregoing discourses, set forth the enormity of mortal sin, and the danger of frequent relapses into it; the order of my subject now calls upon me to propose some general means to prevent this evil. The first of these, and which appears the most natural, is to be solicitous to avoid, not only mortal sin itself, but every thing that borders upon it, and the very remotest steps towards it. For, as the greatest virtue is sometimes owing for its first rise and progress to very small beginnings, so is it also with vice. Hence one false step in the beginning, has often drawn after it a long train of sinful disorders, and the blackest crimes may be ushered in by the smallest failings. Nay, the natural course of things seems to require that it should be so. For vice has its degrees to go through as well as virtue: the soul must be prepared, before she can familiarize herself with it; and it is as unnatural for a man to fall from virtue to the depth of vice, as it is for water that is boiling hot, to pass to the greatest degree of coldness, without being first lukewarm.

For this reason, as there is no degree of virtue so small, but ought to be cultivated and cherished, because it may be gradually improved; so is there no sin so inconsiderable, but what we ought to be jealous of, and carefully put a stop to in the beginning; because if it be neglected, it may prove to be of dangerous consequence, and become the seed of mortal sin:

sin : For how small soever it may seem in itself, it prepares the way for greater ones, and opens a breach for the devil to enter at, and make himself master of the soul, as we are expressly forewarned by the Holy Ghost, assuring us, that *he who contemneth little things, shall fall by degrees.* And by Christ also, who tells us, *that whoever is unfaithful in small things, is also unfaithful in great ones.*

You plainly see, I speak not of the danger of barely committing, but of *contemning*, or *neglecting* venial sins. For there is a large difference between these two ; because to be surprised into them, is an effect of human weakness, even in the most pious Christians ; but to *contemn* them, is not only to commit them with full knowledge and deliberation, but to multiply them one after another, without any farther care or concern to atone for them, or give a check to their growth, by a speedy repentance. Now this contempt or neglect of venial sins, is so great a disposition to mortal, that whoever is guilty of the one, seldom stops long without falling into the other, as I shall endeavour to shew in this entertainment.

The first reason why a contempt of venial sin disposes to mortal, is grounded upon the natural connection the one has with the other. This reason comprehends not all venial sins, with relation to mortal sins in general, but only such venial and mortal sins as are within the same species, or proceed from the same root, and only differ in their several respective degrees. Now the connection between these venial and mortal sins is such, that he who makes a little account of the one, will not long avoid being drawn or surprised into the other. For, it is with the distempers of the soul, as with those of the body : Many have paid dear for
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having neglected a slight indisposition, which, if care had been taken at first, would have gone off without farther consequence; but being neglected, brought them at last to their grave. The scratch of a pin is but a trivial wound, yet if you let it fester, or turn to a gangrene, it may cost you your life. In like manner, though a venial sin be but a slight indisposition, or a small wound of the soul, as I may call it; yet, if through want of timely care, you prevent not its growth, it may easily become mortal, and deprive you of your spiritual life.

Thus he that accustoms himself to pilfering thefts, will not be long before he becomes guilty of great ones. Thus it also often comes to pass, that the first motions of anger or impatience, if not checked immediately, break out soon after into a violent storm, and many times into murmurs and blasphemies against God. Thus again, a customary neglect or coldness in our devotions, paves the way to libertinism. Thus, finally, a small misunderstanding, not immediately made up, sours upon the heart, and turns into implacable rancour; a light suspicion deliberately entertained, is by degrees improved into a consummate rash judgment; an immoderate liberty of discoursing of our neighbour's imperfections, draws on insensibly downright detracting; and indiscreet familiarity smooths the way to criminal immodesties; and so forth, in innumerable other cases, in which venial sins have so great an affinity with mortal, that they are but, as it were, an easy step to it: Nor would this foul guest be able to get admittance into the heart, were it not introduced by failings of a less frightful aspect?

This leads me to a short digression, relating to the *immediate occasions* of mortal sin, which all are indispensably bound to shun. By *immediate*

diate occasions, I mean those which seldom or ever fail of being followed by, and are but, as it were, one single remove from the mortal sin, to which they dispose either of their own nature, or by reason of the peculiar weakness of a temper easily wrought upon. All then, I say, are bound in conscience to shun occasions of this nature to the utmost of their power. The reason whereof is manifest, because their connection with mortal sin is so great, that whoever loves the one, cannot reasonably be supposed to hate the other; as he who will needs be handling pitch, when he can avoid it, may be presumed to be no friend to cleanliness. So that the danger here threatens not barely at a distance, as in the venial sins I have hitherto spoken of, but brings immediate death to the soul, and verifies the saying of *Solomon*, that *he who loves danger shall perish in it*. Whence it plainly follows, that whoever is concerned in any occasion of this nature, and approaches the sacred tribunal without a firm purpose to separate himself from it, is guilty of sacrilege; his confession being a mere mockery, and serving only to render more criminal, instead of reconciling him to God: since his heart keeps a secret correspondence with his enemy, though his tongue makes ever so many protestations to the contrary.

But to return to the point in question: the *second* reason why a contempt of venial sin disposes to mortal, is, because committing them frequently (I mean with deliberation) makes sinning grow familiar to us; it accustoms us to have a kind of disregard to God's holy law, and hardens us insensibly against the *fear* of transgressing: which being one of the strongest fences against sin, when this fence is broke down, a free

a free passage is opened for all sorts of sin to enter in upon us.

The force of this reason will appear the better, if we consider that the first and chief care of those, who are charged with the education of children, is to ground them well in the *fear of God*, and inspire them with a great horror of sin; this being the most solid foundation of virtue, and best security of vice. Now, when a person is thus principled, and the fear of God has taken deep root in the soul; the first proposal of a mortal sin, is apt to startle him as much, as if you should shew him a deep precipice, and bid him throw himself headlong into it. The very thought of it affects him with horror, and serves only to alarm him into a watchfulness and concern, answerable to the greatness of the danger that threatens him.

Nor is the devil ignorant of this great secret. He is too great a master in the mystery of iniquity, and the art of training souls up to it, not to know that to push them all at once to the brink of the precipice, or tempt them to mortal sin at the very first suggestion, is so far from promoting, that it is the direct way to obstruct and frustrate his malicious designs: He knows the net must be spread at a distance, and the danger kept out of sight: He knows a tender conscience must be nicely managed, and weaned by degrees from the shame and fear of sin, in which it was nursed, before it can be worked up to a pitch of boldness, to venture upon offending God mortally: And, the only sure way he has to effect this, is to lead men on gently, from step to step, from one degree of sin to another, till he brings them at last so far, as to make little or no account of deliberate venial sins. For, when this difficulty is
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once well got over, when offending God with full deliberation, though but in small things, is once become familiar and easy, it is manifest, the devil has then got over a very considerable part of his work; because, by this means, the greatest obstacle to mortal sin, I mean, the *fear of God*, and a certain tenderness of conscience, are then, though not wholly taken away, at least removed in a very great measure: and what remains to be done, is little more than leading an enemy against a town, already well disposed and prepared to receive him. And therefore, the devil chooses mostly this slow and gradual method of corrupting innocent souls, and bringing them under the yoke and slavery of sin: A long experience having sufficiently evidenced the infallible truth of this divine oracle; *viz. that he who contemns little things, shall fall by degrees.*

To explain myself by some familiar instance; when, for example, the devil intends to draw a person from his ordinary duties or devotions, in order to draw him insensibly into an irregular course of life, the first step he makes is to bring him to a negligent performance of them: His next endeavour is to prevail, at least, so far upon him, as to make him put them off to some unusual or unseasonable hour: He proposes not as yet an absolute omission of them, because he finds him not disposed to swallow this bait: Besides, he knows the absolute omitting of certain duties is but a natural and easy sequel to our putting them off from time to time, and will soon follow of course. Some hindrance, for example, wholly unforeseen, intervenes at the time designed. The party finds himself engaged in company, which he cannot well leave: It is true, he has at first some squeamishness of conscience

conscience to omit them; but it cannot be helped: Necessity has no law. This happens several times. The scruple he had at first wears off by degrees; he begins to be habituated to it; at length, whether any hindrance happens or not, he wholly lays aside the devotions he formerly used to practise. The omitting of one draws on insensibly the omitting of another; because the ground of it, which is a tenderness of conscience, and a zeal for the service of God, is weakened by it: And thus he falls, not all at once, but by certain easy steps and degrees, into a negligent and slothful course of life, which, as experience convinces, seldom fails to banish from the heart the fear of God, and engage persons in irregular ways, the usual consequences whereof, are habits of mortal sin. So that you see, a small neglect, not corrected in time, proves often to be the first link of a long chain of sins, which at last drag the soul to everlasting perdition.

Nay, we may confidently say of persons that have been virtuously educated in their youth, and early grounded in the fear of God, that the devil, with all his power and malice, would never be able to fasten considerably upon them, did he not get his first hold by sin, which, in appearance, are inconsiderable, and of no consequence; whereas thousands of this sort, have been drawn into the most scandalous and wicked courses, by the very steps I have marked out. How many have turned mere fots, who at first detested the vice of drunkenness, and even had a natural aversion to it; but engaging themselves unwarily in company, were drawn in by degrees from sipping to drinking, and from smaller excesses to greater, till having served this sort of apprenticeship, as I may call it, for
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some time, they became at last complete masters of the trade, and not only follow it themselves, but help to train up others in it? How many, again, have, only by beginning with mock-oaths, run insensibly into the vice of cursing and swearing, though at their first coming into the world, they had the greatest hatred to it? Finally, how many innocent souls have been trepanned this way into all the extravagancies of a disorderly life, who at first would have sooner thrown themselves into the jaws of a bear or lion, than consented to the sins they afterwards committed, without blushing or remorse?

Nay, do we not see daily examples of this nature? A young man enters into the world with inclinations to virtue, and principles of religion to support it; but being now master of a plentiful fortune, the devil puts it into his head that devotion is not a gentleman-like virtue; that regular hours are only fit for colleges and cloisters; and that to be advised by friends, or parents, is to be treated like a child, and kept under tutelage. Here is yet no proposal of any vice: The devil is only busy in disarming his virtue, and he certainly takes the fittest time to succeed in his malicious design; because a young man never stands more in need of keeping up those fences, I mean, *devotion*, *regularity*, and a *docile temper*, to preserve the good fruits of his education, than at the critical time of his first entrance into the world; it being evident, from experience, that the measures a person takes at that time, determine usually his life for ever after, and have a considerable influence upon his happiness or unhappiness, both in this world and the next. So that if he begins then to lay aside the practice
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of a regular and uniform devotion ; if he lives by chance and humour, instead of rule and method ; if he withdraws himself from the direction and charitable advice of friends, for fear of incommoding his inclinations ; we may readily pronounce upon him, that he is in a dangerous way ; and though he be not yet guilty of criminal excesses, they will soon follow ; the fences are already broke down, the passage is clear, and the world and flesh may enter in at leisure.

Hence it is, that as the devil has, by long experience, found this gradual method of corrupting innocent souls to be the most successful, so he certainly inspires those ministers of iniquity, who serve under him in this wicked trade, to employ the same artifice in pursuing their designs. What man has ever had the impudence to make a barefaced criminal proposal to a virtuous woman at the first interview ? He knows it will be rejected with horror and indignation, unless she can first be prevailed upon to lay aside some part, at least, of that modest behaviour, which is the best guard as well as ornament of her sex, and keeps men in respect. For as long as she keeps up to the nice rules of modesty, and neither encourages nor suffers any of those liberties or addresses, by which ill-designing men commonly lay their snares at a distance, her virtue is as safe as a citadel, to which no army can make its approaches. But if those freedoms be tolerated, or allowed of, her virtue may be in danger ; since libertines, who have no other aim than to corrupt it, will be encouraged by it to redouble their endeavours to draw her insensibly into a more criminal compliance.

Wherefore,

Wherefore, to conclude this discourse, it highly concerns all those, whom God has hitherto preserved from vice, to take timely warning by the falls of so many other miserable souls, who stood once as fair for Heaven as themselves, and might have easily maintained their ground, had they but been careful not to give the devil an advantage over them, by putting themselves within his reach, when they ought to have kept him at a distance, which would have certainly secured them against his temptations: For the condition of man's soul in this world, is much the same with that of a town besieged by an enemy: As long as the enemy is bravely repulsed from the out-works, a town is in no danger of being taken; but when he has once lodged himself in the ditch, or counter-scarp, the town itself will be soon forced to surrender. Just so it is with man's soul; as long as we keep the devil at a distance, and by *watchfulness* and *assiduity in prayer*, which are, as it were, the out-works that cover us against him, we hinder him from gaining ground, or approaching near us; we are out of danger of being overcome by him. But if we once let him make himself master of these out-works, though we seemingly resolve to stop him there, we shall soon see ourselves deceived, and experience, to our own sad cost, that it is much easier to keep our enemy quite out, than to dislodge him, when he has once got footing. So that the true secret to avoid mortal sin, is to be tender of committing any wilful venial one, and not to slight them because they are little; *for he who contemns little things, shall fall by degrees.*

THE

THE TWENTY-SIXTH ENTERTAINMENT.

THE SAME SUBJECT CONTINUED.

He that is unfaithful in a small thing, is also unfaithful in a greater. Luke xvi. 10.

BESIDES the two reasons already given, that venial sins dispose to mortal, there is a third of great weight, *viz.* the *diminution of grace*, caused by every wilful and deliberate venial sin; which shall be the subject of this entertainment.

That every wilful and deliberate venial sin causes a diminution of *charity*, and by consequence of *grace*, is the doctrine of all spiritual writers; who, as they all agree that no collection or number of venial sins, how great soever, can of itself utterly extinguish *charity*; so they are no less unanimous in assuring us, that every deliberate venial sin *cools its fervour* in some degree, weakens the power of *grace*, and renders the soul less vigorous and active in resisting the assaults of corrupt nature: All which facilitates of course the way to mortal sin, and disposes the will to it, in the same degree or measure as it takes away from the strength that is to oppose it.

To give you a clear knowledge of this truth, it will be necessary to explain the principle on which it is grounded. You must therefore observe, that in every person, justified by *baptism*, or the sacrament of *penance*, there are two opposite roots, *viz.* *grace* and *corrupt nature*. St. *Austin* calls them *charity* and *concupiscence*; because they only differ from *grace* and *corrupt nature*, as natural properties from the essence they flow from: For as *charity* flows immediately from *habitual grace*, and is inseparably connected with it, so is *concupiscence* no less the immediate effect and inseparable attendant of *corrupt*

rupt nature. *Charity*, as it is here taken by St. *Auſtin*, is the love of God above all things; and by *concupiſcence* is meant its oppoſite love, viz. *ſelf-love*, or the irregular love of ourſelves, or of any creature in order to ourſelves.

Now, all deliberate actions or deſires (I mean ſuch as are either *ſinful* or *meritorious*) have their growth from one of theſe two roots. *Charity* is the root of all meritorious, and *concupiſcence* the ſource of all ſinful actions and deſires: And theſe two oppoſite roots or qualities, act upon each other in the ſoul, much after the ſame manner as two contrary humours do in the body. They are always in diſpute and ſtrife about the maſtery over the heart, and whatever ſide prevails, it either deſtroys or ſubdues, or at leaſt weakens the other in ſome degree; but with this difference, that *charity*, which is the effect of *habitual grace*, may not only be weakened, but utterly diſtinguiſhed and deſtroyed by the prevailing power of *concupiſcence*; whereas *concupiſcence*, though it may be mortified and ſubdued, can never be wholly exterminated in this mortal life. And the reaſon of this difference is, becauſe *charity* goes and comes of courſe with *habitual grace*, from whence it flows; which being a free gift of God, is wholly foreign to our nature, and no part of our own ſtock; and though of itſelf it be a ſubſiſting and permanent quality, and very different from thoſe *paſſing graces*, which move us to action, yet it may eaſily be loſt, and is effectually forfeited by every act of the will conſenting to mortal ſin. But *concupiſcence* is born and bred within us, and ſo cloſely interwoven with our nature, that though *grace* may reſtrain it, and tie it up from doing us miſchief, nothing but death can deſtroy it.

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However, it plainly follows hence, that both *charity* and *concupiscence* have their several degrees of increase and abatement, whichever rise or fall, in proportion as *charity* is more or less vigorous and active in combating against the inclinations of corrupt nature. When *charity* exerts itself vigorously in opposing the irregular desires of *concupiscence*, it gets ground at every step; because by every act it produces or commands, (as divines speak) it merits an increase of grace; whereby it becomes still more active, and better able to resist the assaults of its enemy. But when *charity* grows languid and unactive, it runs insensibly to decay, which, if timely care be not taken to prevent it, must unavoidably terminate in utter destruction; because *concupiscence*, which never lies idle, gets ground in the mean time; and it is the nature of this restless evil, never to leave off pursuing its course, till it becomes absolute mistress of the heart, which must unavoidably follow, sooner or later, if *grace* and *charity*, which alone can restrain it, continue to lose ground by our frequently gratifying corrupt nature, though but in small things: For though the *love of God* be not thus destroyed all at once; yet, like a body labouring under a lingering distemper, or a decay of its vital spirits, it falls away insensibly, till it becomes at last so weak and feeble, that we may give it for lost, at the first violent temptation that assaults it. And thus it is that by gradual diminution of *charity*, or the *love of God*, caused by repeated venial sins, *passion* becomes at length too strong for *reason*, the *flesh* triumphs over the *spirit*, and *charity* is destroyed by *concupiscence*, the effect whereof is the death of the soul.

It is true, this way of destroying the life of the soul, is not so quick as when it is done at one mortal blow? but it is no less sure; and the mischief the soul receives, is in effect the same, whether she be starved out by degrees, or overcome by one brisk assault. This seems exactly conformable to St. *Austin's* doctrine in his 118th epistle, where he compares venial sins to drops of water, which, by their number, sink at length a ship. His words are these: *If a ship be lost, what matter is it whether she be swallowed all at once, or gradually sunk by many drops of water entering at a leak, and neglected to be pumped out?* For if the devil can but rob us of God's grace, it equally serves his turn, whether he rifles us all at once, or by small parcels. Nay, as a modern author observes ingenuously, the smallest sins are often the greatest stratagems; because we are but seldom on our guard against them, neither we are much affected with the mischief they do us. We regard them as inconsiderable evils, not reflecting that their poison, though it be not mortal in itself, may prove so in its consequence.

Nay, to persons strongly inclined to sin, it is morally impossible it should be otherwise, because every deliberate venial sin they commit, is still a weakening of their spiritual strength, and deprives them of some part of that portion of grace, which should support them in the day of battle. Who is there that ever fell into mortal sin, but he if looks back, and traces his misfortune to its source, will not find, that his neglect of lesser failings was the first step to it? *The greatest crimes, says St. Bernard, have their beginning from the smallest sins; for no man becomes completely wicked on a sudden.* It is always either some neglect of duty, or coldness in our devotions,

devotions, or want of guard upon our senses, or some immoderate dissipation of the mind, or vanity of the heart, that gives the first occasion to the greatest falls. For though these seem to be all trespasses of little or no consequence, and would be so in reality, if care were immediately taken to apply their proper remedies, and hinder the poison from spreading farther; yet when, on the contrary, they are neglected, when we make little account of them, and take no care to put a stop to their farther progress, the case is quite otherwise. For then every venial sin we commit, helps to embezzle some part of our stock of grace, which is the strength of our souls, and renders us less able to resist the power of *concupiscence*. Every venial sin lays us then more and more open, and widens the breach for our enemy to enter at, who, we may be sure, neglects not to take us at this disadvantage, and improve the opportunity we give him, by thus weakening and disarming ourselves; so that though venial sins cannot of themselves cause the death of the soul, yet they are always a remote disposition to it; and, if neglected and multiplied, waste our spiritual strength, and dispirit our souls to such a degree, that under this weak and languishing condition, it becomes very difficult to preserve the life of grace for any long time.

I shall now conclude, with some directions particularly proper for those, who are already engaged in any habit of mortal sin: For the very same method, which, if it had been used in due time, would have preserved them from falling into that unhappy state, is now the only effectual expedient to draw them out of it. They fell into by it degrees: For no man plunges himself into vice all at once. Many repeated

falls, and those usually occasioned by the same previous failings, brought them into the habit of sinning; and they have no other way left to get out of it, than by carefully avoiding those very occasions and lesser failings, which were the preparatory steps, as well to their first fall, as the following ones, which became the links of that chain, which has fettered them up, and holds them in the bondage of sin. For though the relapses of habitual sinners come usually on much quicker than their first fall, and as the habit gets strength, returns quicker upon them, yet they are always gradual in some measure, and ushered in by sins of a lesser note, the avoiding of which is the only thing that will certainly secure them.

First, then, it behoves them to use their utmost endeavours to avoid all wilful and deliberate venial sins, of what kind soever, though they seem to have no natural connection with the mortal sin, to which they were inclined; whereof I have already given the reason, to wit, because every venial sin, of what kind soever it be, causing a diminution of grace, is by consequence a weakening of that spiritual strength, which their great weakness and proneness to sin stands highly in need of, to support them against the temptations of the devil.

Whence it also follows, that any wilful neglect or omission of their usual devotions, may be of ill consequence to them: because prayer, being one of the principal means to obtain God's grace, which alone can support them, a neglect of it must needs deprive them, at least in some part, of this necessary and powerful succour. And though the casual omission of the duty of prayer may be no great matter in itself, it is so to one that stands in need of a special
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and extraordinary grace to keep him from falling; and this is chiefly to be obtained by an extraordinary exactness in every duty, since our Saviour has declared, *that he who is faithful in small things, shall be so in great ones*; because his constant fidelity in small things, will be rewarded with so plentiful a succour from Heaven, as will strengthen him, even against the most violent assaults of his enemy.

Now, if it be so necessary, for the recovery of an habitual sinner, to avoid even such wilful and deliberate venial sins, as have no natural connection with the prevailing habit, it concerns him certainly much more to avoid all such, as either of themselves, or with regard to his particular temper, have a considerable connection with, and are usually the remote steps to the sin it inclines him to. I need not explain myself any farther, nor specify particulars; for whoever is engaged in any habit of sin, cannot but know, by fatal experience, what are the immediate, and what the remote occasions of it; what objects are most apt to inflame the distemper; and, finally, what it is that usually lets in temptations upon him, or heightens them to a pitch that carries danger with it.

This, I say, every one, in the circumstances supposed, cannot but know by his own experience; which, therefore, is to direct him in what he is to do, or rather in what he is to avoid: For, if he seriously resolves to work himself out of that miserable state into which he is fallen, he must not stand considering, whether the occasion be immediate or remote; whether it threatens him with imminent danger, or only at a distance; but he must fly from it if possible, though ever so remote. He must labour to stifle, even the smallest temptations in

their very birth, and avoid every thing, how trivial soever in appearance, that may serve to increase them. If he does otherwise, his fall is almost unavoidable; because, considering the proneness of his nature to sin, which is always ready, as it were, to meet the temptation half-way, the very remotest occasion may very easily draw him into an immediate one; and the smallest temptation, if neglected, may soon be heightened to a degree of violence, which he will not have the resolution to resist. His condition is much like that of a man upon slippery ice, who, when he is once in motion, cannot stop when he will, because his very weight carries him on whether he will or not; for so it is in some measure with one that is habitually, and by consequence strongly inclined to sin. When the passion is once raised, though by ever so trivial an occasion, it is very hard for him to put a stop to it; for being pushed on by the weight of corrupt nature, he is often carried on to greater extremities, than he either intended or could have imagined at first.

Hence it follows, that the amendment and salvation of an habitual sinner, depends not so much upon the performance of any one great or difficult thing, as upon a constant practice of a great collection of little ones, and a watchfulness in shunning all occasions, though ever so remote, of the sin he is chiefly inclined to. And since his own experience can best inform him what these are, he must be his own director in a great measure.

However, since considering man's natural inconstancy, and love of liberty and ease, this constant watchfulness and performance of a great number of things, though but small of themselves, must needs be burdensome to nature;

ture; whoever is concerned in the condition I speak of, and resolved to work himself out of it, must undertake this task with *steadiness* and *courage*. *Steadiness* is necessary to render him uniform and constant, both in his exercises of devotion, and the use of all other remedies proper for his cure. An aguish devotion, made up of alternative fits of heat and cold, will never do his work; because he will always lose more ground in the one, than he will get in the other. But *courage* is no less requisite to make him go on chearfully in this undertaking; because the many duties that attend it, putting him, of course, under a great restraint, both by depriving him of many things he loves, and obliging him to many things he hates, will strongly tempt him to throw off the yoke, and return to his customary liberties: Which temptation is so powerful, that many, who have seemingly begun with the greatest resolution, have at length been wearied out, and overcome by it.

He must therefore labour to arm himself against it; and when he finds the thoughts of liberty insinuating themselves, or any degree of despondency or sloth creeping upon him, he must immediately rouse himself with these or such like considerations; that if the restraint he suffers be painful, it is far to be preferred before the slavery of sin; that how troublesome soever it be, his condition has made it absolutely necessary; that since he has been the wilful author of his own distemper, it is but just, he should submit to the trouble of the cure; finally, he must encourage himself with considering, that the task he has undertaken will, by a constant performance, grow daily lighter upon his hands; because every victory he gets over himself, is like cutting off a limb from the body of

sin he has to grapple with; and that by patience and perseverance, he will not only deliver himself from the servitude he truckles under, but prepare his soul for the crown, which *Christ* has promised to those that conquer.

THE TWENTY-SEVENTH ENTERTAINMENT.

THE NECESSARY CONDITIONS OF REPENTANCE.

Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of penance.

Luke iii. 8.

AS avoiding venial sins, keeps us at a distance from mortal, so a hearty and sincere repentance strikes at the very root of it; it cancels sins past, and guards the heart against their return: But then it must be that repentance which I call *heartly* and *sincere*: The proper nature and necessary conditions whereof, shall be the subject of this entertainment.

To mark out the necessary conditions of a sincere repentance, I cannot set before you a better pattern, than what our Saviour himself proposes in the parable of the *prodigal son*. This young man, longing to be free from the subjection and constraint he was under in his father's house, demanded and obtained of him the portion due to him in reversion. Whereupon, taking leave of his father, he went into a foreign country; where, in a short time, he spent all he had in luxury and riot, and fell under great extremities of poverty and want; insomuch, that, to prevent starving, he was forced to take service under a farmer, who put him to keep his hogs; and his hunger was so great, that he was even glad to eat of the husks that were thrown to the swine. But the sense of his misery brought him to himself, and gave him the first thoughts of returning to his father. He discoursed thus with

with himself: *How many hired servants of my father have bread enough, and to spare? And I perish with hunger. I will arise, and go to my father, and I will say unto him, father, I have sinned against Heaven, and before thee, and am not worthy to be called thy son; make me as one of thy hired servants.* Luke xv. 17, 18, &c. Which resolution he performed accordingly, and was thereupon again received into favour.

This is the parable of the *prodigal son*, as far as relates to my present subject. Let us now make the application of it. You see, the first step he made towards his being reconciled to his father, was the feeling sense he had of his unhappy condition; for had he remained insensible of it, it is probable he never would have thought of returning to his father. This marks out to us the ground-work and foundation of a sincere repentance, *viz.* the feeling sense a sinner ought to have of the miserable state his soul is fallen into, by having renounced the subjection and obedience he owed his heavenly Father.

Now, that this ground-work of repentance, which is to support the whole building of a new spiritual life, may be solid and lasting, it must be laid upon a double motive, *viz.* the double malice and deformity of sin; *first*, in relation to God; and, *secondly*, in relation to his own soul. A sinner, therefore, that will lay the foundation of a solid repentance, and work himself into a hearty sense of his unhappy state, must consider, with a serious reflection, that he has offended a God of infinite majesty; rebelled against his divine sovereign; trampled upon his sacred laws; trod under foot the precious blood of *Jesus Christ*; violated the covenant he made with him at his baptism; been false to his vow;

ungrateful to a benefactor, that has heaped infinite blessings upon him; despised his friendship, and preferred before it the sordid interest or pleasure procured him by his mortal enemy, the devil.

These truths, well considered and digested, will, with the blessing God usually gives our endeavours, open a sinner's eyes, and excite him to horror and detestation of his past disorders. But when he has thus considered the malice and enormity of sin, as it is an offence to God, he must then proceed to consider it with relation to his own soul: and here he will discover a frightful scene, and find himself reduced to a state of misery in soul, infinitely lower than the *prodigal son* was in body, by having left his father's house. A soul in grace is the darling of Heaven, the joy of angels; the adoptive son of God, destined to inherit an everlasting crown; the spouse of *Jesus Christ*, and temple of the *Holy Ghost*; rich in merits, and adorned with all the precious ornaments of virtue, to render her acceptable to so divine a guest.

But, O good God! What a change, at the very moment that a mortal sin is consented to! The most dreadful and surprising disasters that ever have been heard of; all the tragical scenes God's wrath has ever exhibited on the theatre of this world; all the desolations and plague, war and famine have ever caused; all the revolutions of states, reduced from happiness and plenty, to misery and want, are but weak images of it. Imagine the greatest beauty transformed into a hideous monster; imagine the heir-apparent of a crown become a slave; imagine the richest monarch in the world reduced to beggary: finally, imagine a glorious and wealthy city laid waste, and turned into a heap of rubbish;

bish; and whatever you can imagine, will come infinitely short of the change wrought in a soul, which, from the state of grace, falls into that of mortal sin.

But, to return to the parable of the *prodigal son*; as soon as he was become sensible of the folly he had committed, in quitting his father's house, he took this resolution, *I will arise, and go to my father*; which he performed without delay. Here we have the second condition of a sincere repentance marked out to us, *viz.* a firm and efficacious purpose to rise from sin, and quit all the occasions of it. For, without this purpose, all is but a sham repentance. *If thou art penitent, (says St. Austin) be sorry for what thou hast done; if thou art sorry for it, do it no more. For if thou continuest to do it, thou art no penitent.*

It is doubtless, a manifest delusion to imagine, there can be a true conversion of the heart, without any change of actions: Because a heart that is truly converted, loves God, and values his friendship above all things of this world. For, as a soul falls into sin, by preferring some interest or pleasure before Almighty God, so she rises again from sin, by preferring God before all interest or pleasure, and loving him more than any advantage or pleasure this world can propose. Now, it is principally by our actions we must judge, whether we love God to that degree as to prefer him effectually before all things of this world; because all deliberate actions proceed from some love or inclination of the heart. Love is the root, and our actions are the fruit; and it is by the nature and quality of the fruit, we must judge of the nature and quality of the root from which it grows. *A good tree, says Christ, cannot bring forth bad fruit, and a bad tree*

tree cannot bring forth good fruit. And it is by the fruit we must know whether the tree be good or bad.

How can we then rationally judge the root is changed, as long as there appears no change of fruit? How can we judge the heart is truly converted, whilst the actions remain the same? That a person has a sincere detestation of his past sins, and yet continues in them? Finally, that the love of God is predominant in his heart, when no effect of that love appears in his actions? This is wholly inconsistent with the nature of love or charity; because charity is a practical virtue, which inclines the soul to action, and manifests itself by outwards works.

But, let us still keep in view the pattern we have before us of the prodigal son. *I will arise,* says he, *and go to my father, and I will say, father, I have sinned against Heaven, and before thee: I am not worthy to be called thy son; make me as one of thy hired servants.* He begins with an humble accusation of himself, and sincere acknowledgment of the fault he had committed. He prevents his father's justice by pronouncing sentence upon himself. He not only submits to, but imposes on himself a rigorous penance, which was to last his whole life, and desires to be received into his father's house, upon no other terms, than to be treated there as a common servant. Whereby we are not only taught, that humility is an essential part of repentance, but also instructed in the very method how this virtue is to be practised by a penitent.

In the first place, therefore, the *prodigal son* begins, as I have observed, with a sincere acknowledgment of the fault he had committed. He makes no apologies or excuses for himself, but represents his fault under the most aggravating

vating circumstances, by owning himself guilty of a most grievous offence, both against God and his father.

It is a great remark of a sincere repentance, when a sinner makes a plain and full confession of his sins, without the least dissimulation or disguise; when he lays the state of his conscience clearly open before his confessor, without mincing the matter, or any studied excuses, or artificial palliations: When, finally, he is so disposed, that were it in his power, he would open his heart as fully to him, as it is known to God himself. For such an humble disposition is a sign he has a feeling sense, both of the offence he has committed, and the desire he has to discharge his conscience of it: But when a penitent uses certain artifices to palliate his sins, in order to save himself a little confusion; when he interweaves his confessions with apologies and excuses, or indirect accusations of others, to shove off part of the blame from himself; or, what is worse, when he wilfully omits some material or aggravating circumstance, it is a sure mark he is void of that humble disposition, which a penitent ought to bring with him to the sacred tribunal: Because, whoever has a true sense of having offended God, and considers he has deserved to suffer eternal confusion before God and man, is willing to submit to a short humiliation, in exchange, of the everlasting shame and confusion he has deserved. He thinks himself most mercifully dealt with, in being only obliged to discover that to a single person, who is under the strictest obligation of secrecy, which, if he were treated according to his merits, would be laid open to the view of all the world, and cover him with everlasting shame and confusion.

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When, therefore, a penitent has faithfully practised this first lesson of humility, by submitting to the confusion of a sincere and full declaration of his sins, let him proceed to the second, consisting in a hearty desire to satisfy God's justice by *worthy fruits of repentance*. This lesson of humility is clearly taught us in the behaviour of the *prodigal son*. For having humbly confessed his fault, he is so far from soliciting for an entire exemption from punishment, that he even suggests to his father, the manner how he deserved to be chastised by him. *I am not worthy*, says he, *to be called thy son, make me as one of thy hired servants*. This marks out plainly to every penitent, of what rank soever he be, that from the time of his reconciliation to his heavenly Father, till the last moment of life, he is bound to become an humble and faithful servant of *Jesus Christ*, submit to all his laws, and stoop to the humble yoke of the gospel. This, with repeated acts of a sincere contrition, is precisely his duty, in the faithful discharge whereof, he may hope to satisfy the justice of his offended Father, by worthy fruits of repentance.

It is certain indeed, that the divine justice demands a kind of proportion between punishment and sin. But, the measure of this proportion is unknown to us. God will exactly observe it in the world to come; and he who endeavours to come nearest to it in this, does certainly put himself into the securest way to salvation. But this rule being very general, is apt to perplex great sinners, who yet are the persons particularly concerned in the comfortable moral, of the parable of the *prodigal son*.

I suppose then, that a person who has led a disorderly life for a long time, is touched with
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a sincere repentance, and being desirous to return to God, asks what he must do in order to it. I answer him in short, that after he has made a general confession of his whole life, and accepted the particular penance his confessor shall enjoin him, he must, from that time forward, be faithful in performing all the duties of a Christian life. Nothing can be more reasonable and practicable than this. Let me explain myself: He must, I say, be faithful in performing all the duties of a Christian life; that is, he must renounce sin, and all the occasions of it: He must live in an entire observance of the commandments of God, and the precepts of the church, to the utmost of his power: He must suffer all crosses God sends him with an humble patience: Finally, he must be faithful in the discharge of all the duties of his respective state, and endeavour to do all this in the spirit of penance, supplying what may be wanting to the rigour of it, by a profound humility, and the constant practice of some voluntary mortifications.

But since an end can never be attained, without the use of proper means in order to it, the practice of the duties I have mentioned, draws after it an indispensable obligation of a regular and uniform devotion: This being the channel through which God's grace must pass, to strengthen a penitent in the good resolutions he has made, and enable him to walk on steadily in the path of God's commandments. The principal branches of what I call a regular and uniform devotion, are morning and evening prayer; a devout observance of Sundays and holidays; the daily reading of some spiritual book, and the use of the sacraments at set times. All which must be regulated with a due regard
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to the respective circumstances a person is under.

This is the task a repenting sinner must undertake, of what state or condition soever he be. No rank or quality can exempt him from it: Though he be a crowned head, if he pretends to enter into the true way of penance, he must perform all the duties I have marked out: This he must do, cost what it will. He must renounce sin, and all the occasions of it; and since it is an undoubted maxim in morality, that he who is obliged to the end, is likewise obliged to all the necessary means in order to it: it follows, that a regular and uniform devotion is also an indispensable part of his duty, because without it he cannot obtain the grace necessary to enable him to live up to the character of a Christian.

This also draws after it an obligation of all such voluntary self-denials, as he shall find necessary to subdue his passions, and to preserve in himself the spirit of a penitent. If a repenting sinner be perseveringly faithful in the discharge of these duties, he needs not doubt but he is in that narrow way which leads to salvation. For *he who puts his hand to the plough and looks not back*, that is, who lives in the practice of all Christian duties whatsoever, and continues in them to his death, *is fit for the kingdom of God*, and will certainly be saved.

Thus then, you see all the steps a sinner must make in his return to his heavenly Father; he must begin with a deep sense of the disorders of his life past: He must make an efficacious purpose to rise from sin: He must undergo the confusion of a full and clear confession of his sins: Finally, he must resolve to satisfy God's justice by worthy fruits of repentance. I have shewed

shewed what this imports, and the obligations it draws after it. It concerns us now to consider, whether the recovery of God's favour be not well worth a chearful compliance with these duties. I have not mentioned any extraordinary rigours, being sensible all are not strong enough to bear this yoke : But the yoke I have proposed is no other than that of the *gospel*, which *Christ* himself has imposed on all his followers ; and therefore, whoever says he is too weak to bear it, declares implicitly his resolution not to do penance, nor save his soul.

It is true, a sinner newly converted, cannot live up to all the duties of a Christian, without using great violence to himself. But he must consider that *penance* is a *laborious baptism*, and that he cannot be saved without doing penance. He must consider that heaven is to be gained by violence, and that whoever pretends to attain to it any other way than that of subduing his passions, pretends to have found out a new path, wholly unknown to the four Evangelists. Finally, he must consider, that the particular difficulties he will meet with from the strength and violence of his passions, as they are the fruit of his past sins, so are they a just punishment of them, to which he must submit, and draw an advantage from, by making it a part of the penance, by which God's justice is to be satisfied. He has invited an enemy into his country, and he must be at the trouble of driving him out by force of arms : But to be successful in this spiritual warfare, he must resolve never to lose courage, nor suffer himself to fall into the least despondency, either of God's grace or mercy, who will most certainly crown such patient endeavours, with the reward promised to those who persevere to the end.

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THE TWENTY-EIGHTH ENTERTAINMENT:

THE DANGER OF DELAYING REPENTANCE.

Delay not to be converted to God, and put it not off from day to day. Eccl. v. 8.

THE delay of repentance has proved fatal to thousands. How many forming to themselves imaginary schemes, of returning to God some time or other, they knew not when, have at last been hardened in sin, and died impenitent? How many, again, projecting to execute their resolutions of amendment at some fixed time, have been prevented by a sudden and unprovided death? I know habitual sinners are apt to flatter themselves, that since sudden deaths are but rare, they need not disquiet themselves with excessive fears on that account. But I heartily wish, they may not find their error when it is too late. And since it is an error, of the most dangerous consequence, I shall endeavour to disabuse them, by shewing that the number of those, who are surprised by death, is far greater than is usually imagined; which shall be the subject of this entertainment.

The point in question being a matter of fact, you may perhaps expect to be entertained with frightful relations, of persons suddenly carried off by apoplexies, or found dead in their beds, after they lay down in perfect health; or crushed with the fall of a house; or struck dead with thunder; or burnt alive with some accidental fire. But it is not my intention to trouble you with a long enumeration of accidents of this nature: Neither do I design; to lay any stress upon the many tragical relations of hurricanes, that have laid whole countries waste; of inundations, wherein many thousands have perished in a moment;

moment ; or, finally, of frightful earthquakes, that have in an instant levelled whole cities with the ground, and buried their unfortunate inhabitants under their ruins.

It is not my intention, I say, to insist upon these, or such other unquestionable facts; though they might suffice to convince us, on the one hand, that the number of those, who are surprised by death, is not so small as is usually imagined ; and to assure us, on the other, that the odds each one has on his side, is a very unsafe foundation to build any security upon. For though a concurrence of natural causes, contributes for the most part, to occasion those great and general disasters, and some places are more obnoxious to their unhappy influences than others ; yet we ought principally to consider them, as instruments of the divine wrath, justly provoked to those exemplary chastisements, by the sins of the people ; and, by consequence, till we are sure our lives were more innocent than theirs were, or that the sins of the nation are less crying than theirs, which we have no great encouragement to think ; we have reason enough to fear the divine justice, which never wants means to execute its decrees, may sooner or later condemn us to taste of the bitter cup, so many others have drunk before us.

I shall only touch upon one familiar reflection, before I come to my principal proof. Is there any one amongst us, arrived at the age of a man, that has not, one time or other, been exposed to some danger, in which it was at least an equal hazard that he might have perished ? It is true, Almighty God has been so merciful, as to have hitherto preserved us on these occasions ; and, without all dispute, his goodness ought rather to affect us with a due sense
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of gratitude, than encourage us to persist in sin upon a rash presumption of being still favoured with the like protection. However, it is most certain, that our having escaped past dangers, is a proof that we have been really exposed to them: And if these be so common, that we cannot, with all the precautions possible, prevent our being every now and then concerned in them, it follows plainly, that it is a great rashness to build any security upon our hopes of not falling under the misfortune of a sudden and unprovided death.

But, to come to my principal proof, I give it now for granted, that those sudden deaths, which are occasioned by unforeseen accidents, are not so frequent, but that each particular person, may have considerable odds on his side, that it will not be his misfortune to perish that way: Yet give me leave to tell you, there are other sorts of deaths, which, in effect, are really sudden and surprising, though they appear, and are vulgarly esteemed otherwise: For may not all those be properly said to be surprised by death, who are overtaken by it, much sooner than they expected? Or, may not that be called surprising, which comes upon us, when we look not for it, and therefore finds us unprepared? We shall certainly think it so, if we but consult the most ordinary and familiar notions of things. A general of an army is, for example, said to be surprised, when his enemy attacks him either unlooked for, or much sooner than he expected. A criminal, who thinks to have his trial put off, when he finds himself summoned to the bar, before the time imagined, is truly surprised, and taken unawares. In like manner, therefore, all those, upon whom death

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seizes much sooner than it is looked for, are properly surprised by it.

Now, is not this the case of most worldly persons, that is, of those who are lovers of this world? There is great reason to believe it so; *first*, because it being very natural to flatter ourselves with the hope of what we heartily wish and desire, it follows, that those who love this world, as they desire to stay long in it, so are they apt enough to believe they shall, and make their wishes the measure of their hopes; and therefore it is no wonder, they should be greatly surprised, when they find both the one and the other wholly disappointed, by an untimely or unexpected end.

The *second* reason is, because the thought of death, being an ungrateful entertainment to those that are fond of this world, they usually decline as much as they can; and if it sometimes obtrudes itself, they immediately divert it with some more pleasing thought. Now, what can be the consequence hereof, but that whenever it comes upon them, it comes wholly unlooked for, and finds every thing out of order? For can any thing come more unlooked for, than what we scarce ever so much as thought of? Those indeed who often entertain themselves with the thoughts of death, and contract a kind of familiarity with it, take care not to be unprepared, because they live in daily expectation of it. But as for those who never think of it, but against their wills, how should they ever be prepared for it? And if they never are prepared for it, how should it but surprise them when it comes?

But, to pass from general reasons to particular instances; I shall chiefly exemplify in two sorts of persons: The first, are those who have their heads full of worldly projects; one, for example,

example, is in pursuit of some great fortune; another, has his children to settle in the world; another, has a project of raising his family; and so forth. Now, though projects of this nature be not only lawful in themselves, but absolutely consistent with the watchfulness a Christian ought to have, and the concerns of his soul, yet many times it happens quite otherwise; but particularly in relation to those that have but little sense of religion, and are cold in the practice of its duties. For when persons of this temper happen to have any worldly business upon their hands, they generally pursue it with that eagerness and over-earnest application, that the heart is wholly engaged that way, and scarce any time or thought is allowed for the more weighty concerns of eternity.

But, alas! how often does it happen, that whilst they are thus busy in pursuing their worldly projects, death is at the same instant pursuing them close at the heels? How often does it happen, that before their beloved designs are brought to an issue, a mortal distemper overtakes them, and hurries them, perhaps in two or three days warning, to another world? And are not these men now surprised by death, whom it thus cuts off, before they have got half way to their intended journey's end? They probably reckoned upon many years of life, or at least sufficient time to accomplish their designs; in the mean time the concerns of eternity were neglected; no preparation was made, no provision laid up for the life to come; and here they find themselves, all on a sudden, in the hands of death, and summoned before God's tribunal, without having taken any measures, to dispose them seriously for that great trial, on
which

which their everlasting lot depends. . And is not this a very great and dreadful surprize ?

The second sort of persons usually concerned in this misfortune, are those who put off the reformation of their lives, either wholly at random, or to some prefixed time they propose to themselves. As, for instance, a young man that is vigorous and healthful, considers death at a great distance, when it will perhaps seize him within a few days. He depends upon the advantages of youth, or the strength of his constitution, and doubts not but to see many years pass over his head. This flattering prospect of a long life, encourages him to let loose the reins of his youthful passions, and indulge himself in all sinful liberties. He thinks it will be time enough to become sober and virtuous, when the heat of youth is over ; for then he resolves to take up in earnest. But, alas ! he is quite out in his accounts ! Death, that inflexible executioner of the divine decrees, overtakes him in the full career of his youth and youthful passions, he is suddenly nipped, like a fair blossom in an *April* frost ; all his fine purposes are blasted : His body, which but a few days before, was so vigorous and healthful, is sent cold to the grave, and his soul to the tribunal of God, there to receive her irrevocable doom. And does not death again come very unlooked for and unexpected, to all persons under these unhappy circumstances ?

Another finds himself deeply engaged in some habit of sin ; and, upon hearing a sermon, or reading some good book, is made sensible of the danger of his state, and resolves to mend. But he cannot come to a resolution, to set about it immediately. Some business of moment lies upon his hands, and must first be dispatched :

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He is under certain engagements, which must first be broke; and this cannot be done all at once: But he will have more leisure and opportunity afterwards, to apply himself seriously to the concern of his soul's salvation. With these and such like plausible pretences, which, in effect, are but suggested by, and serve to flatter corrupt nature, he deludes himself into a persuasion, that it is better to put off the business of his designed reformation, till these pretended obstacles are removed.

But, what happens in the mean time? Whilst he is thus seemingly big with resolutions, to be executed he knows not when, a mortal fever seizes him: The doctor is immediately sent for: who, to encrease his misfortune, flatters him, perhaps to the very last, with hopes of recovery; till manifest symptoms of approaching death appearing, he is at length forced to tell him his case is desperate, and that he must prepare to die. And what a dreadful surprise, what a thunder-stroke must this be to one in his condition! I can compare it with nothing more properly, than the consternation of a city surprised by an enemy: And as in this case nothing is done orderly, or according to the rules of discipline, but all things are carried on with hurry, disorder and confusion; so in the case of a person unexpectedly alarmed, with the news of approaching death, no order or method is observed, but every thing is performed with a precipitation answerable to the pressing exigency of the unhappy condition of the party concerned.

A priest is sent for in haste. As soon as he comes a confession must be made, though without any regular preparation, because the case admits of no delay. The other sacraments follow of course, with the same hurry and precipitation; and

and with this lame preparation his soul goes forth, to try her fortune in the other world: But I leave every one to judge, whether a person in this case be not surpris'd by death, since it obliges him to hazard his soul upon so weak a bottom, and undertake his great voyage of eternity, with such a disproportioned and irregular preparation, as cannot but render his salvation extremely doubtful: And since this happens but too frequently, it follows, that the case of those, who are surpris'd by death, is not so rare as is usually imagined.

But you will ask, how can that death be call'd surpris'ing, which, having some days of sickness before it, gives the party concerned warning of his coming, and consequently sufficient leisure to prepare himself? I answer, that the death of a person habituated to sin, and in this condition seized with that distemper, whereof he dies in a few days warning; his death, I say, is truly and effectually surpris'ing. My reason is, because, although he has some days of sickness allowed him, yet, morally speaking, he can scarce be said to have sufficient leisure allowed him to prepare himself. The case is evident, if the distemper happens to affect his head, and take away from him the use of his reason: For alas! where is then the very possibility of making any manner of preparation! And is there any thing more ordinary, either in malignant fevers, or other mortal distempers, than to have the use of reason quite taken away, and the party concerned wholly incapacitated for any serious, nay, rational thought? So that, in this case, a person under the forementioned circumstances, is as effectually surpris'd by death, as if he were shot dead with a cannon-bullet; since it cannot be doubted, but that death is truly surpris'ing,

prising, which excludes all possibility of a preparation, by whatever accident the possibility of it is occasioned.

It is true it seldom happens, that sick men's ravings are so interrupted, as not to allow them some lucid intervals, in which they may be capable of reflecting on the danger of their state : But, supposing all this, and even allowing them the use of reason, as much as men mortally sick can have ; yet, considering their sad state, on the one hand, and the disadvantages of a dying man, on the other, we may still say that, morally speaking, such an one has not sufficient leisure to prepare himself. The reason is, because the sufficiency or insufficiency of the time or leisure cannot be justly measured, but with a due regard, partly to the nature of the work that is to be performed, and partly to the circumstances of the party concerned : because what is sufficient leisure for an easy piece of work, and to one that lies under no impediment, may be altogether insufficient for a work of a difficult nature, and in relation to a person that labours under such hard circumstances, must needs be a very great hindrance to his due performance of it.

As, for example, much less time and leisure is required, to make up a short and easy account, than one that is much entangled, and has been neglected for several months and years ; so that if a careful steward, who daily makes up his accounts, should be summoned by his master at half an hour's warning, though the time of half an hour be but short in itself, yet that steward would not be taken unawares, because his daily care in looking into his accounts, secures him against all possibility of a surprise ; but if another steward, that has neglected his accounts for several years, should be called upon by his master,

ter, and that at a time when he is laid up with a fever, or the gout, we may truly say, that though he had a whole week's warning given him, he would be taken unawares; because, though a week be much longer than half an hour, yet, since it is not only disproportioned to the difficulty of the work he has to perform, but his indisposition renders him, over and above, incapable of setting heartily about it, it follows, that he would be as really and effectually surpris'd, as if he had been summoned upon one half hour's warning.

Now, this is a lively image of the case before us, if we consider it with a due regard, both to the difficulty of the work that is to be performed, and the impediments that hinder the performance of it: For, *first*, as to the difficulty of the work that is to be performed; to express it in a word, it is a true change of heart corrupted with habits of sin, and accustomed to resist the divine inspirations; of an heart that has been an utter stranger to the love of God, and hardened against the most powerful motives to soften it into compunction. And is this a work to be begun in our last sickness? Is that a proper time for so difficult a task? Or is it such an easy matter to banish from the heart a predominant love, that has been long fixed and established in it? Do we find by experience, that we can love or hate the same object, and change our affections or aversions just as we please? Nay, does it not convince us, on the contrary, that to disengage the heart from any passion of long growth, is a work which requires both time and patience, in a long practice of serious endeavours? We are sure St. *Austin* found it so: who, in his *confessions*, owns, that even after his judgment was fully convinced, his stubborn and rebellious heart held out for many years.

It is true, there is no difficulty in repeating a verbal act of contrition, or pronouncing an act of

the love of God : but there is a large difference between saying and doing. If sorrow and repentance were no more than so much lip-labour, the case would be much altered from what it really is : But there is something more required than this : the heart must be truly changed, and speak within what the tongue pronounces outwardly : Almighty God, who for many years has been contemned, and set at nought, must be truly and sincerely loved above all things : The object of a passion, that has always been cherished, must be truly hated and detested : And here lies the stress of the difficulty, which, since it usually costs, even those who are in perfect health, much time and labour, we may easily guess how little a person, struggling under the pains and terrors of approaching death, is qualified for the performance of it : For if this be a difficult task even in time of health, when the mind is composed and serene, and the party concerned has all the advantages of prayer, pious books, and reiterated consideration, to come to his assistance, how will he be able to perform it in any tolerable manner, when being seized with a violent and mortal distemper, he is rendered almost utterly incapable of using any of these exercises, and consequently deprived of every thing that should be a help and encouragement to him ?

For can there be imagined a greater hindrance to a serious application to any business, that requires thinking, than a sickness, whereby the whole body is put into a violent ferment, and disordered in the highest degree ? Do we not find, by experience, that even a slight indisposition suffices to render us incapable either of reading or praying with any tolerable attention ? And why so ? Because the soul, attending then to the pain itself, is diverted by it from attending to any other

other object: And how then will she be able to apply herself to the weighty concerns of salvation, when the body will be seized all over with a mortal anguish? When the head is disturbed with violent achings? The stomach tortured with unspeakable oppressions? The heart besieged on all sides with the pangs of death? How can we imagine, a person in this condition capable of an application answerable to the greatness and difficulty of so weighty a concern? So that it is evident, a sinner's last sickness, is so far from giving him sufficient opportunity to prepare himself for death, that there is no part of his whole life more improper for it: And, by consequence, we may justly fear, that tho' he has the use of his reason for some days, death takes him unprovided; because he has neglected to make any provision for it before-hand, and is at that time under such hard circumstances, as are the greatest impediments imaginable to a due preparation for it.

Thus we plainly see the danger of delaying repentance, because either a sudden death may prevent the very possibility of it: or, if our last sickness allows us some time, it usually obstructs the due performance of it, with such difficulties as cannot but render the sincerity of it very hazardous and uncertain. Let us then practice the advice given us by *Ecclesiasticus*, *Not to delay to be converted, nor to put it off from day to day.*

THE TWENTY-NINTH ENTERTAINMENT.
THE NECESSITY AND EFFICACY OF PRAYER.

Ask, and ye shall receive. John xvi.

PRAYER, when duly performed, is the great remedy against sin, and whoever prays well, cannot but live and die well; if therefore we fail

in the one, and miscarry in the other, we must attribute it either to the *neglect*, or some *defect* of prayer; and conclude with St. *James*, that *when we ask, and receive not, it is because we ask amiss*.

There are some, who, by their neglect of this holy exercise, seem not sufficiently convinced of its *necessity*: Others, not finding their prayers crowned with the success they proposed to themselves, stagger in their faith, question its *efficacy*, and so, either lay their devotions wholly aside, or perform them only by fits and starts: Others again are indeed uniform in performing their daily task, but do it with that hurry, coldness, and dissipation of mind, that they seldom go beyond the form and ceremony of prayer. Lastly, there are some, who pray heartily indeed, and yet receive not, because they ask things not conducing to the real interest of their souls. These therefore, being the obstacles, which chiefly obstruct the use or fruit of prayer, I shall speak of them in the three following discourses, and shew, 1. Its *necessity* and *efficacy*. 2. The *conditions* that ought to attend it. And, 3. The *end* to which it ought to be directed. The *necessity* and *efficacy* of prayer, shall be considered in this entertainment.

The entire dependance we have upon Almighty God, is a convincing proof of the necessity of prayer, which is the ordinary channel through which God's grace is conveyed to the soul. Now, to prevent the least doubt of our depending entirely on God, *Christ* himself has declared it in the strongest terms. The passage I mean, is that of the 15th chapter of St. *John*, where our Saviour compares himself to a *vine*, and all Christians to the *branches* of it: For of all branches, none are more useless than a vine branch, when it is not nourished by the vine: For it can neither

ther bear fruit, nor be adapted to any manner of use; nay (as *Ezekiel* says) not so much as to serve for a pin to hang a vessel on; but is only fit to be burnt. And therefore our Saviour pursues the similitude thus. *As a branch cannot bear fruit, except it abide in the vine, no more can ye, except ye abide in me. He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit. But if a man abide not in me, he is cast forth, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire.* John xv. 4, 5, 6.

Nothing can be a more lively representation of our entire dependence on the grace of *Jesus Christ*, than what is set forth in this similitude. However, lest we should imagine his grace to be only necessary for the most difficult acts of virtue, he closes the forementioned parable with these remarkable words, *without me ye can do nothing*. Whereupon St. *Austin* discourses thus: *He says not, ye can do little without me, but ye can do nothing without me*. Whence he infers, *wherefore whether it be much or little, it cannot be done without him, without whom nothing can be done*. No, not the least thing conducible to salvation can be done, without the grace of *Jesus Christ*. And therefore St. *Paul* assures us positively, *that we are not sufficient to think as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God*, 2 Cor. iii. 5. and in the hymn said in the mass, during the whole octave of *Pentecost*, we address ourselves thus to the divine Spirit, *sine tuo numine nihil est in homine, nihil est innoxium*; that is, *without thy grace man has nothing but what is sinful*. Hence it plainly follows, that without God's grace we can neither practice virtue, nor overcome sin; and it remains now only to consider, whether prayer be not the ordinary means appointed by God to obtain this blessing. These words of *Christ*, ask,
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and ye shall receive; and again, pray, that ye enter not into temptation, *Matth. xxvi. 41.* leave no room to doubt of it. And therefore, both *St. Thomas of Aquin*, and the holy fathers before him, teach unanimously, that it is decreed by God from all eternity, that no blessing shall be received but by the means of prayer.

St. John Climacus tells us, that prayer is the source of all virtues, and the channel through which the grace of *Jesus Christ*, and all gifts from above are conveyed to us. He calls it the nourishment of the soul; the light which dissipates the darkness of the mind; an excellent remedy against temptations; a pledge of God's love to a soul, and a mark of predestination.

St. Austin calls prayer the key of Heaven, which unlocks all its treasures, and gives us access to the blessings there laid up for us: Others compare it to *Jacob's ladder*, by which angels ascend to Heaven, to represent our necessities to the giver of all good gifts, and descend again on earth, to bring us new blessings from thence: And therefore as we stand daily in need of God's grace, to strengthen us against the temptations we live continually exposed to, so it is our duty to beg it daily of him.

The 17th chapter of *Exodus* contains a remarkable figure of this truth. It is there related that the *Amalekites*, having raised a formidable army to dispute the passage of the *Israelites* into *Canaan*, *Moses* commanded *Joshua* to lead them on against the enemy: But at the same time, being sensible that God alone could give the victory, he retired to the top of a neighbouring mountain with *Aaron* and *Hur*, in order to implore the divine assistance. The next day therefore, whilst *Israel* fought against *Amalec*, and *Joshua* performed all the parts of a general, *Moses* prayed
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for a blessing upon his people, and ceased not all the time from lifting up his hands to Heaven: But the battle lasting many hours, he was so tired with that painful posture, that he could not hold them up any longer: and the scripture observes, that as soon as *Moses* let down his hands, *Aaron* and *Hur* perceived from the top of the mountain, that *Amalec* prevailed against the *Israelites*; whereupon *Moses* sat down upon a stone, and *Aaron* and *Hur*, placing themselves on each side of him, supported his hands, and immediately the *Israelites* recovered the ground they had lost, and gained a complete victory.

This is a plain figure of what happens to us in our spiritual combats. For as the *Amalekites* endeavoured to oppose the passage of the *Israelites* into the Land of Promise, so the devil employs his utmost strength to obstruct our happy passage to the heavenly *Canaan*. The means then to disappoint his malice, is to retire daily to the mountain of prayer, and there humbling ourselves under the powerful hand of God, by a deep sense of our weakness, implore his merciful protection, and never cease lifting up our hands to Heaven, till we have obtained a complete victory over him: For, if we grow weary of this holy exercise: if sloth prevails upon us to let fall our hands, that is, to abandon or discontinue our prayers, the enemy will most certainly gain ground and prevail against us: Because God's holy Grace being our only security, if we forfeit this blessing, by a neglect of the means appointed to obtain it, we become destitute of strength, are left to our own weakness, and our condition is no better than that of soldiers presuming to come into the field naked and unarmed.

St. *Austin*, to express our spiritual poverty, and dependence on the divine assistance, says, *we*

are all beggars of God. It is therefore fitting, and he requires it of us, that we should address ourselves to him with the same unwearied application, as beggars do to keep themselves from starving: For a beggar is never weary of asking, as long as there are hopes of getting any thing; he waits whole hours at the rich man's door: He watches all occasions to meet him, and lay his necessities before him; when alms are to be distributed, he is never out of the way: In a word, as hunger and want attend him every day, so it is his daily business to seek for relief.

This then must be our pattern, in relation to the duty of prayer: This must be our constant method if we intend keeping our souls from starving, as they will certainly do, in case we neglect to procure them the supplies they daily stand in need of. We must never be weary of asking, since Almighty God is never weary of giving: We must be daily knocking at the gates of our bountiful benefactor, and lose no opportunity of presenting ourselves before him; especially when he is present on the altar; where he is an inexhaustible source of blessings to those, who make their humble supplications to him, and come with hearts dilated to receive them: Finally, we must proportion the earnestness and assiduity of our prayers, to the greatness of our necessities and wants.

But the slothful Christian pretends to be at a loss to find a precept that obliges him to pray every day. But, if I should ask him what precept obliges him to eat every day, he would not be much at a loss to answer the question: he would soon tell me, a natural principle of self-preservation obliges him to it: He would tell me, that unless his body was daily nourished, his strength would fail him; he would be unable to do his work, and starve for want of it. Now let him apply these reasons

reasons to the soul, where they have at least as much weight, and he will soon see the obligation of daily prayer. For doubtless our souls have as just a title to our daily care as our bodies: And therefore, since prayer is their necessary nourishment, if we pray not every day, our spiritual health will be impaired, and decay by insensible degrees: We shall be unable to discharge the duties incumbent on us: Finally, our souls will languish for want of their due allowance of spiritual food to support them.

You will ask, does it not suffice then to keep the Commandments, as they are delivered to us? Does it not suffice to hear Mass on *Sundays* and holidays, according to the precept of the Church? To the first question I answer, it is not to be doubted, but whoever keeps the Commandments will be saved: But can the Commandments be kept without the help of God's grace? Or, will God bestow his grace upon us without our asking? Are we not daily tempted to sin against the Commandments? And has not our Saviour ordered us *to pray that we enter not into temptation?* Does he not bid us *ask, seek and knock?* Nay, *to pray always, and never be weary?* And why so? Because as the devil is indefatigable in seeking our ruin, so ought we to be indefatigable in soliciting Heaven to protect us against him; so that the very obligation of daily keeping the Commandments implies an obligation of daily prayer; and we need no other commandment, than the Commandments themselves to oblige us to it: Because the same law that commands any duty, induces of course an obligation to employ such means, as are necessary for the discharge of it.

Now, as to the precepts of the Church, which only obliges us to hear Mass on *Sundays* and holidays; the Church, in limiting this obligation, had

had a prudent regard to the generality of Christians: And, since she foresaw that many would be under circumstances, which would render their daily complying with this duty morally impossible, and sloth might prevail upon others to trespass frequently against it, she would not impose a daily obligation, which might be an occasion of endless scruples to some, and a stumbling-block to others. But it is very certain, the Church's intention was not either to encourage sloth, or to inspire us with an indifference to hear or not to hear Mass upon ordinary days, but rather to create in us a great esteem of this devotion, by making it a necessary and principal duty of the most solemn days of the year.

But there is a second objection particularly against the *efficacy* of prayer, grounded upon the little appearance of its fruit in many persons, who seem to be much addicted to it. For if prayer were so powerful a remedy against sin, as I have endeavoured to shew, the consequence would be, that the more we prayed, the more we should be exempt from failings. Whereas the contrary appears in many, who, though they daily spend much time in prayer, yet have their failings, as well as they who pray less.

To this I answer, *first*, that if they who pray very much, are still subject to many failings, it is probable their condition would be still worse, in case they prayed less. Just as when a person has an ill habit of body, the remedies he takes will not hinder his being often out of order; but, in all likelihood, his case would be much worse, if he took less care of himself: And therefore, as there are some malignant humours, which cannot be corrected but by a long course of physic, so there are some distempers in the soul, which, according to the ordinary course of grace, require a much longer application of remedies than others;



others; and it would be next to a miracle, if a passion of long growth, and deeply rooted in the soul, were perfectly mastered on a sudden. So that the objection proposed, proves not the weakness or inefficacy of the remedy, but the malignity of the distemper it sometimes meets with.

However, St. *James* has given another answer to it in these terms: *Ye ask, and ye obtain not, because ye ask amiss.* Many seem, in outward appearance, to pray very often, yet, in effect, pray very seldom: They recite indeed many prayers, and are very busy in turning their books, or dropping their beads, yet, with all this pother, pray very little; because prayer is not a mere lip-labour, but consists principally in the desire of the heart; for, to speak properly, vocal prayer is nothing but the desire of the heart, expressed in words: So that where there is no desire of the heart, there is no prayer, though the lips and tongue be ever so busy. Now it is certain, there are many who read, or recite their prayers, without any sincere or hearty desire to obtain the things signified by those prayers: And, by consequence, there are many who say their prayers without praying.

This is the case, *first*, of those that say their prayers by rote, and out of mere custom, without any application of the mind; for these pray not much better than so many parrots, that should be taught to repeat our Lord's prayer: In effect, if their distractions be voluntary, all their praying is no more than talking so much in their sleep. *Secondly*, it is the case who resolve to continue in the immediate occasion of sin; for how can they have a hearty desire to overcome sin, who resolve to live exposed to such occasions as will certainly lead them into it? *Thirdly*, it is the case of all such as come to pray with an actual affection to sin; because a wilful affection to any thing is inconsistent

sistent with a hatred of it. Now we can only have a hearty desire to be delivered from things which we regard as evils, and have by consequence some degree of hatred to.

Thus we see how persons may seem to pray very much, and yet pray very little in effect; because they may ask, without desiring to obtain; and therefore it is no wonder, if praying in this manner, they continue subject to all the infirmities of corrupt nature: For it is not by such mock prayers a sinner draws down mercy from Heaven; it is the prayer of a *contrite and humble heart*, the prayer of a soul sensible of her unhappy state, and earnestly desiring to be delivered from it, which God had a regard to. And therefore, if our prayers prove unsuccessful, it is an evident mark they were defective some way or other. And this is so certain a truth that it can admit of no dispute.

For since *Christ* has made us a positive promise, that *his Father will grant us whatever we shall ask in his name*, it follows, that we must either question the veracity of his promise, or conclude, that when we fail of obtaining what we ask, there has been some defect in our prayers, which has justly deserved a refusal; supposing always that what we asked, was for the good of our souls: And therefore, whoever prays to be delivered from his usual failings, and yet continues in them, will find, upon a serious enquiry, that he either has not prayed as much as he ought, or has been guilty of some neglect in the performance of it. So that, upon his falling into any sin, let him but call himself to an account, and reflect seriously, whether he took care to raise his heart to God at the first approach of the temptation? Whether sloth hindered him not from kneeling down, and lifting up his hands

hands to Heaven, when he had the opportunity to do it? Whether his daily task of prayer, has been ever neglected? Finally, whether his heart has performed its duty as well as his tongue? For these enquiries will lead him to the true source of his failing, and convince him that he has not obtained, because he has not asked as he ought.

Let us then resolve to be constant in performing this great duty; let no morning or evening pass without allowing our souls a sufficient portion of this spiritual nourishment. They both need and certainly deserve this care as well as our bodies: For, do what we can to preserve our bodies, they must sooner or later return to dust; but the noblest part, our souls, must be nourished for eternity.

It is true, indispensable business may sometimes be a lawful hindrance; but we must take care it be not the pretence when sloth is the real cause of it. If the concern of our souls be as it ought, we shall easily forecast things so, that temporal affairs will seldom interfere with our duty to God: For where there is a real and hearty concern for any thing, it suggests a thousand expedients, which coldness and indifference would easily overlook. We may perhaps imagine a neglect of this nature to be of little or no consequence. It is certain however, that when it is often repeated, and proceeds from coldness and sloth, it is not so trivial a matter as some take it to be; but, on the contrary, both very displeasing to God, and dangerous in its consequence.

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THE THIRTIETH ENTERTAINMENT.

THE PRINCIPAL CONDITIONS OF PRAYER.

Ye ask, and ye receive not, because ye ask amiss.

James iv. 3.

HAVING now shewed the necessity and efficacy of prayer, the conditions, which ought to attend it, offer themselves next. These therefore shall be the subject of this entertainment.

A Christian, in time of prayer, ought to consider himself as a criminal that comes to throw himself at the feet of his offended sovereign, and implore his mercy: For what are we, in effect, but criminals, that have offended the infinite majesty of God? What are we but rebellious subjects, who have lifted up our hands against our Divine Sovereign, and depend wholly on his mercy for our deliverance from the sentence of eternal death, which our sins have deserved? Now, if our hearts were thoroughly penetrated with this truth, when we come to present ourselves before Almighty God in prayer, it would inspire us with an awful respect, and help to keep us within those bounds of decency which suit both with our condition, and the business we are about.

Our condition, as I have said, is that of criminals; and our business in time of prayer, is to implore God's mercy; we ought therefore to appear before him in the posture of criminals, that is, in the most submissive and respectful manner possible; and be careful to avoid whatever carries with it an air of vanity and presumption. The humility of our hearts ought to manifest itself in the humiliation of our bodies, and our very looks and postures ought to act the part of supplicants, as well as our tongues.

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However, I mean not here to encourage singularity, or affectation; in which vanity and hypocrisy have usually a greater share than devotion. There are some who, with their groans, or the loudness of their prayers, disturb all that are near them, or draw their eyes upon them by certain actions or gestures, fitter for a private oratory than a public assembly: These are apt to delude themselves, and imagine they are truly humble, because they are so in appearance. True devotion is hearty and earnest, but not noisy; it has a regard to decency, but avoids ostentation and shew; finally, it seeks to edify, but begs not the applause and esteem of men.

There is, therefore, a mean between overacting devotion, and shewing no devotion at all; and our behaviour, especially in our time of public prayer, ought to be so regulated between these two extremes, as to be free from all appearance of affectation on the one hand, and edify by all the marks of a solid piety on the other: For though the devotion of the heart be a tribute we owe to God, alone, yet that exterior devotion, which consists in a respectful composure of the body, is a duty we owe both to God and our neighbour; and no man whatever, unless disabled by sickness or infirmity, is exempt from the obligation of it; because no person in the world is too great to serve God with decency, or appear before him in an humble manner: Nay, the greater a man's condition is, the more he is obliged to it, in relation both to God and man; in relation to God, because being particularly indebted to him for the temporal advantages he enjoys above others, he is bound in gratitude to appear more zealous in his service; as those that are greatest at court are bound to espouse the honour and interest of their prince with

with greatest zeal: They are also under a stricter obligation with regard to men; because, having more the eyes of men upon them, and whatever they do being of a much more powerful influence, than the actions of those who move in a lower sphere, they have it in their power either to promote the decency of God's service, by recommending it to others by their examples, or to bring it into contempt, by shewing a contempt of it in their practice.

It is true, the outward posture of the body, is not of itself essential in the duty of prayer; for a man may pray sitting, standing, walking, or lying down, as well as kneeling. A traveller may pray upon the road, a tradesman in his shop, a plowman in the field, and a sick man stretched out upon his bed: but there is a difference between what necessity imposes, and that which is the effect of vanity, indifference and sloth: So that the disposition of the heart is usually manifested by the outward posture of the body, when a person has it in his choice. Thus wandering looks are a symptom of a dissipated mind: Affecting certain airs in the church, betrays a vanity not suiting with the disposition of a suppliant, or a heart humbled before Almighty God: Finally, lolling in a lazy posture, or kneeling on one knee, when all knees ought to be bent, to adore *Jesus Christ* present on the altar, is an indecency, which plainly shews not only a want of devotion, but a deadness of faith, and furnishes the enemies of the Church with arms against us; it appearing highly improbable that they, who believe *Christ* really present, should behave themselves disrespectfully before him.

But though the outward decorum or respect ought to be carefully observed in time of prayer, the inward attention of the mind is of much greater importance;

importance ; because if this be wilfully wanting, our prayer is defective in its very substance : For what is prayer, but the elevation or raising of the mind to God ? When therefore the mind is not raised to God, but either kept down with the weight of earthly cares, or distracted with frivolous amusements, the consequence is, that there is no prayer : Again, what is properly vocal prayer, but the desires of the heart expressed in words ? For the tongue is but the interpreter of the heart ; and words are designed for no other use than to signify what passes within the mind : If therefore they have no connection with our thoughts, they are in themselves no more than empty sounds, and a mere lip-labour, which God has no regard to. It is the prayer of the heart, as I have already said, that moves the divine mercy to compassion : It is the prayer of the heart, that mounts like incense up to Heaven, and brings down the promised blessings to us. So that if the heart prays not, the motion of the lips and tongue, though ever so busily employed, can no more properly be called prayer, than such a number of words repeated by a man out of his senses.

Let no man therefore flatter himself that he has prayed much, because he has recited a great number of prayers, unless he be sure his heart has performed its part as well as his tongue ; for though our lips move without interruption, our prayer is interrupted, as often as we deliberately interrupt our attention, which is the life and soul of prayer : But when the heart, in time of prayer, is not taken up with amusements, that are indifferent in themselves, but consenting to some sinful passion, or meditating some unlawful design, then it becomes that sort of prayer which the
scripture

scripture pronounces abominable in the sight of God.

However, I speak only of distractions that are voluntary, and every one must be his own judge how far he is guilty of them ; for as to those that are involuntary, and pass without reflection, it is certain they are no prejudice, either to the merit or efficacy of prayer, provided there be no negligence on our side : And it is no less certain, that in our state of natural weakness, in which we are not masters of our imaginations, it is humanly impossible we should be wholly free from them : So that all we have to do, is to use reasonable endeavours, that we neither occasion them by a wilful previous neglect, nor entertain them with reflection, when they obtrude themselves upon us. When we have secured these two points (which however, ought to be done without an over-scrupulous solicitude, or putting our conscience upon the rack about it ; so that, if we doubt whether we have entertained them with reflection or not, we ought to judge in favour of ourselves ; it being morally impossible to have a full reflection without knowing it.) When, I say, we have secured these two points by a moderate care, we ought to look upon distractions, how frequent soever, as temptations not consented to, and ourselves as mere sufferers in them ; nor draw any consequence from them, to discourage us from a cheerful *perseverance* in this holy exercise : which is the third condition necessary to render our prayers effectual and acceptable in the sight of God.

This condition is plainly marked out to us by *Christ* himself, in the 11th chapter of *St. Luke* ; where he proposes the parable of a man, who coming to his friend by night to borrow some loaves of him, is at first refused ; but continuing
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to beg and knock at his door, obtains at length his request by his importunity and perseverance : And though the application of the parable be clear, our Saviour himself was pleased to make it in these remarkable words : *I also say unto you, ask, and it shall be given to you ; seek, and ye shall find ; knock, and it shall be opened to you : For whoever asks, shall receive ; and he who seeks shall find ; and it shall be opened to him that knocks.* These are *Christ's* own words, which, as they plainly teach us that perseverance is a condition of prayer, so they encourage us to the practice of it, by shewing its power and efficacy, and representing its fruit and success as owing to it. The same is likewise marked out in the prayer of the *Cananean* woman, who obtained of *Christ* by her importunity, and forced him, as it were, to grant to her perseverance, what he had denied to her first prayer.

However, to be rightly understood, I mean not by perseverance in prayer, a daily continuance of it for many hours together, or that our prayers are to take up the greatest part of the day ; for this is too violent to hold ; and experience has afforded but too many instances that grasping at too much often ends in doing nothing at all. A traveller that has a long journey to make, is in danger of fainting, or stopping short by the way, if he overstrains himself at first ; and a constant moderate pace will sooner bring him to his journey's end, than running himself out of breath by fits and starts. And so it is in the practice of devotion : we have perhaps a long journey to go ; if therefore, we overstrain our devotion, we shall run it out of breath before we get half way. This has been seen in many indiscreet devotees, who, measuring their strength by their own vanity and presumption, neglected the rules of moderation ;
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and in process of time, finding themselves overcharged, grew weary of the burden, threw off the yoke that galled them, and ran insensibly into the opposite extreme.

It is certain, that a surfeit of devotion is as dangerous to the soul, as that of meat is to the body; when we are once cloyed with it, the appetite is ever after set against it, and it is hard to come again to relish it, even in a moderate way: So that the rule of praying ought, in a great measure, to be the same as that of eating: We must take daily enough of it to nourish our souls; but we should usually rise from prayer, as from table, with an appetite: This will make us more willing to come to it again the next day, and the same practice being repeated every day, our devotion will become uniform and regular. And it is this I mean by perseverance in prayer, and recommend as a point of the greatest importance, and an assured means to obtain daily the measure of grace we stand in need of, for the support and nourishment of our spiritual life.

I suppose then that every Christian, who has a concern for his soul, will oblige himself, by the advice of his director, to some regular devotion, suited to the circumstances he lives in. As to those that are engaged in a religious state, they have their path marked out before them, which, if they but follow, they cannot go astray: It will certainly lead them to a happy end, if they never go out of it; and the only advice I have to give them is, never to amuse themselves with particular private devotions, till they find they are every day exact and punctual in practising those that are prescribed them by the constitutions of the house they live in. This is properly the uniformity and perseverance in prayer suited to their state, which nothing but sickness, or obedience

dience to the orders of superiors, ought ever to interrupt: This is the perseverance which will render their prayers efficacious, and draw down the blessing of Heaven upon them.

But as those that live in the world, they being under no constraint of rule or vows, are free to choose that method of devotion which suits best with their circumstances: But when their choice is once well made, they ought not easily to change it; because this leads to fickleness and inconstancy, which is the bane of perseverance, and the most dangerous enemy it has to struggle with; for nature seeks change and variety in every thing, even in pleasures: So that pleasures themselves, if not seasoned with variety, become tedious, and we grow weary of them. This is certainly a great weakness in human nature, and it is that weakness which we call *inconstancy*: But if this prevails upon us, even in things that are of themselves agreeable and pleasing, it is easy to judge what strength and resolution we stand in need of to bear up against it in the practice of duties, to which we have a natural repugnance. So that whoever resolves seriously to be perseverant and uniform in the duty of prayer, must be prepared for this combat against himself, that is, against his own natural inconstancy: He must not be surprised to find a repugnance to do the same thing every day, nor discouraged if this repugnance grows violent upon him; for if he lets himself be overcome by it, he is in danger of losing all the fruits of his past devotions; but if he yield not to it, he may justly regard it as a trial of his virtue, which will not lessen, but increase the merit and efficacy of his prayer.

Prayer is a duty, and since every duty is a kind of clog and constraint upon human nature,
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it is no wonder the practice of it should not be attended with any sensible satisfaction. This is indeed sometimes the reward of prayer, but never a quality or attribute belonging to the nature of it; so that we are not bound to pray with *pleasure*, but we are bound to pray with *perseverance*, whether we find a pleasure or disgust in it, whether an inclination or repugnance to it: This is precisely our duty; this God requires of us, and will reward with a plentiful blessing, if we be faithful in the discharge of it.

But besides the temptation of *inconstancy*, which we shall always have to struggle with in this holy exercise, we must also arm ourselves against that of *despondency*. We are naturally impatient in all our desires, and instead of waiting with an humble submission for the will of God, we would have it at a beck or call. If the fruit of our prayers answers not immediately our expectations, we fall into dejection, and are ready to consult our ease rather than continue an exercise, which we begin to regard as a fruitless labour. This was not the practice of the *royal prophet*, who says thus of himself, *expecting, I expected the Lord*: Which repetition of the same word is an *hebraism*, importing a long and patient perseverance in waiting for the will and pleasure of Almighty God? And what was the effect of it? He tells us in these following words, *and he listened to me, and heard my prayers*. The prophet *Isaiah* exhorts us to do the same, and promises the same success: *If the Lord (says he) makes delay, wait for him: For he will certainly come, and he will not tarry*.

It becomes not sinners to stand upon terms with their offended God, or pretend to set him the time of his mercies. It is our business to do our duty, in hopes of obtaining at length the
blessing

bleffing we pray for, and refift with an unwearied perfeverance all difcouraging fuggeltions, as fnares laid for us by the enemy of our fouls. This is the method of the children of this world, in their temporal concerns: They are indefatigable in following their fuits, folliciting their lawyers, appealing from one court to another; and are thought happy, if they obtain at leaft a favourable decree, though purchafed with incredible pains and coft. And this ought alfo to be our method in the bufinefs of falvation; and particularly of thofe, who labour under more than ordinary difficulties, they muft be indefatigable in purfuing their point, never weary of folliciting Heaven, never difcouraged at feeming difappointments: If they leave off praying, they give up the caufe for loft; but if they perfift in it, with an unwearied patience and perfeverance, they have folid grounds to hope a happy ifTue, and that God would take his time to caft a favourable regard upon them. Their very perfeverance in prayer is a fruit of their prayer, and pledge of future mercies in ftore: For Almighty God, who is infinitely good and merciful, beftows not his favours by halves, and when he gives the grace of perfeverance in prayer, it is a mark he defigns to give much more, and reward thofe happy difpofitions his grace has already formed, by granting not only what we have fo long prayed for, but favours that furpafs our higheft defires.

Thus when we fee the principal conditions requifite to render our prayers effectual, and the true meaning of this promife of *Chrift*, *Ask, and ye fhall receive*. *Ask*, that is, pray with *humility* and *refpect*, pray with the *heart* as well as the *tongue*, pray with *perfeverance*, and ye will certainly receive. For it is an undoubted truth, that *Chrift* will not be wanting to his promife, if we

be not wanting to our duty ; and that if *we pray and receive not*, the true and only reason is, *because we pray amiss*.

THE THIRTY-FIRST ENTERTAINMENT.

THE END OR INTENTION OF PRAYER.

Ye ask, and ye receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts.

James iv. 3.

THE latter part of this text, discovers a considerable irregularity, relating to the *intention*, or principal *end* of prayer. And though I can scarce suspect any Christians so corrupt, as to pray for things with an express intention to be furnished with means to satisfy their lusts, yet it is not to be doubted, but that Almighty God, who is the searcher of hearts, sees them often so disposed that if he should grant them the temporal blessings they pray for, they would most certainly abuse them to their own eternal ruin, by employing them in the gratification of such passions as have the greatest ascendant over them.

This obliges me to give some directions concerning the general end or intention of prayer, especially when any temporal concern is the immediate subject of it. For when we pray for spiritual things, which in their own nature have a relation to the good of our souls, our prayers cannot be displeasing to God, provided they want not any of the conditions I have already spoken of in my last discourse : But when some temporal blessing is the immediate subject of our prayers, there is always some danger of swerving from the intention, by which they ought to be directed ; and so they may be either pleasing or displeasing to God, according to the end we have principally
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in view : some directions then relating to this end, shall be the subject of this entertainment.

All moral actions have a tendency to some principal end, which we call the motive or intention, for which we act ; and it is this end, that makes them either good or bad : But with this difference, that actions which are bad in themselves, can never become good by being done for a good end : whereas those that of themselves are indifferent or virtuous, become absolutely good or bad, from the principal end or motive we propose to ourselves in the doing of them. Prayer (for example) is of itself a religious duty ; yet if the motive of our praying be to get the esteem and applause of men, instead of being devout, we become hypocrites, and shall receive our reward with the *Pharisees*, who stood praying at the corners of the streets, that they might be seen by men.

In like manner, if the principal end of our prayer be the obtaining of some temporal good, and stops there, I may properly call it a mere interested and selfish devotion, prompted by, and wholly tending to gratify self-love. Not that we are forbid to pray for temporal things : For *Christ* himself has taught us to ask our *daily bread* : and to pray *to be delivered from evil* : And the practice of the Church encourages it, by ordaining public prayers, to avert or prevent public calamities. But in praying for temporal things we must have a farther view, and whilst these are the immediate subject of our petitions, they must be referred to a nobler end, and regarded only as means subservient to it.

If you ask me what this end is, I answer, that it is no other than God's glory, and the good of our souls. The reason is, because as Almighty God, to whom our prayers are addressed, is a

pure spirit, so the principal end of our prayers ought to be purely spiritual; and as God bestows upon us his temporal blessings, not for their own sake, but to serve us as means and instruments of salvation: so we must ask them with the same intention: If this be wanting, our prayers are unworthy to be presented to, and accepted by Almighty God: as not being conformable to that end, to which all things in this world are ordained by their great Maker, and which alone deserves to be regarded by him.

Thus when we pray for health, our end must be to employ it in God's service; if the subject of our prayer be to beg reasonable conveniencies of human life, we must at the same time have a better life in view; and desire the helps and comforts of the one, only as means to forward us on in our journey to the other: Finally, if we importune Almighty God, to deliver us from evils that oppress us, or dangers that threaten us, Heaven and the good of our souls must still preponderate in our hearts. This must be our chief concern, this regarded as our principal interest; and all other things with subordination to it. Whoever prays with this disposition, is sure to be heard; that is to say, is sure not to be disappointed in the principal end of his prayer, though he obtains not the temporal good he prays for: But he who prays without this disposition, is either not regarded, or if he obtains the thing he asks, it is a token of God's anger, rather than his mercy towards him.

This is St. *Austin's* doctrine, who delivers it in these remarkable words. *Quædam*, says he, *negat propitius Deus, quæ concedit iratus*, that is, *God refuses some things, when he is propitious, which he grants when he is angry*. He refuses them, when he is propitious, because he knows they

they will be hurtful to us: and he grants them, when he is angry, because he foresees they will become our scourges, or by our abuse of them, be the occasion of our future ruin. What a comfort is this for those, who wait with patience for the will of God, even when their prayers are seemingly unregarded? And how ought it to check the impetuosity of our desires when they are ready to mutiny against Heaven, because they are not gratified in the very way they ask for.

When the sons of *Zebide* engaged their mother to ask of *Christ*, that *one of them might sit at his right, the other at his left hand, in his kingdom*, he checked their ambitious requests, with this answer, *ye know not what ye ask*: And this is literally true, whenever we pray for any temporal concern: We truly know not what we ask; because we know not whether it will promote or hinder our salvation: We know not whether it will draw God's blessings, or his malediction upon us. And if then, in this case, instead of an *angry grant*, he sends us back with a *propitious refusal*, have we not reason to sit down content, and bless his infinite goodness, for having had more regard to our real interest, than the irregularity of our desires? Are we not ungrateful to God, and unjust to ourselves, when upon any disappointment, we lash out into murmurs and complaints, and are ready to accuse his providence of partiality, in the distribution of his temporal blessings?

But, Almighty God regards these complaints, as the tears of senseless children; and, as he best knows what is expedient or necessary for us, so he has also a truer love for us, than we have for ourselves. *A loving father, says Christ, gives not his child a serpent for a fish, nor reaches him not a scorpion for an egg.* We often indeed act

the part of senseless children; we cry out for the *serpent*, imagining it to be a *fish*, and reach our hands out greedily at the *scorpion*, mistaking it for an *egg*: But our Heavenly Father shews himself a father indeed, and pitying our childish mistakes, is deaf to our cries, and refuses us the trifles we ask to our prejudice, to bestow real and solid goods upon us; unless, perhaps, provoked by our impatience and murmurs, he lays aside the tenderness of a father, lets us have our own wills, and leaves us to smart under the just punishment of our rebellious lusts.

We have a figure of this truth in the person of *Rachel*. She had been barren for several years; which, in the time of the old law, was looked upon as a great disgrace: But, she bore her affliction so impatiently, and her desire of being delivered from it was so immoderate, that she declared she should die with grief, if she were not blessed with children: *Give me children, or else I die*, was her prayer. At length she had children given her, and died in a painful labour; so that what she had begged with so much impatience, as the only means to save her life, became, by a just disposition of the divine providence, the occasion of her death.

And how many parents have also too eagerly importuned Almighty God, for the blessing of the marriage state, and found it afterwards the greatest cross of their old age? How many, afflicted with sickness, in which they might have sanctified their souls, have impatiently begged for health; but when they enjoyed it, abused the benefit against their benefactor, and turned reprobates? How many, in fine, have prayed for riches, which, if not abused by themselves, were by their children made the support of their extravagancies, or an occasion of endless broils? And how happy had these persons

persons been had Almighty God been propiti-
ously deaf to their prayers? Had he mercifully
refused to hearken to their inordinate requests,
which he granted in his anger, to punish them
with those very things, which they asked, un-
doubtedly, without any regard to the end, they
ought principally to have proposed to themselves.

This truth is confirmed by a terrible example,
related in the 11th chapter of the book of *Num-
bers*. It tells us, that the *Israelites* in the desert,
being weary of eating nothing but *manna*, began
to murmur, and cry out for flesh; and thereupon
importuned *Moses* to intercede for them to God,
to grant them their desire. *Moses*, though sen-
sible of the unreasonableness, and apprehensive of
the dangerous consequence of it, yielded to their
importunity, and addressed himself to God in their
behalf; but the scripture says, his wrath was
highly kindled against them: And who would
have expected any thing here but a flat denial?
But it happened quite otherwise; God told
Moses, that since the *Israelites* had cried out for
flesh, they should have it; and thereupon caused
a wind to blow such a number of quails into their
camp, as was sufficient for the whole multitude;
who fell immediately upon their prey, and thought
themselves happy, in having obtained what they
had longed for; but it cost them very dear: For
the meat was yet betwixt their teeth, as the
scripture expresses it, and the wrath of God fell
upon them, and destroyed many thousands of
them upon the place; which from that time was
called *the sepulchre of inordinate lust*: Because
the *Israelites* had there inordinately lusted after
flesh.

This example shews how dangerous it is, ei-
ther to repine inordinately, under the condition
God's providence has allotted to us, or importune
him for temporal blessing, without an absolute

submission to his holy will and pleasure. It is also a convincing proof of what St. *Austin* had told us, that *God denies some things when he is propitious, which he grants when he is angry.* And so we see, that wicked men are generally more successful in compassing their ends, than devout and virtuous Christians. Because the children of this world are permitted to enjoy this world, and have their wills gratified now, but their punishment is to come hereafter: Whereas the just being considered by Almighty God as his own children, he refuses to put those things into their hands, which may be an obstacle to the eternal happiness he has prepared for them.

Thus it often happens, that a virtuous Christian, being much afflicted with sickness, prays to God for health, and he hears him not, because he foresees that if he had his health he would abuse it: Another labours under great want, and petitions earnestly for relief; but God is deaf to his prayers, because he knows the poverty he suffers is more conducing to his salvation, than the relief he prays for: A third is eagerly bent upon some worldly business, in the success whereof he promises much happiness and satisfaction to himself. But Almighty God foresees, that what he pursues as a means to make him happy, will prove the occasion of his ruin; and therefore, has no regard to his mistaken prayer, but lets all things fall out cross to his desires. In all which cases, what appears to us as a refusal, is a real grant of greater favours than those we sue for, though not so pleasing to our inclinations; however, like children when crossed in their wills, we are apt to break out into complaints, as if we had received hard measure; and if God bore not with this our weakness, but dealt with us as he did with the *Israelites* in the desert, by gratifying our desires, we should, like them, find but too soon the effects
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of an angry grant, and wish too late to have been favoured with a *propitious refusal*.

To come now to a conclusion; the principal fruits we must draw from this discourse, is a firm resolution to make the will of God the sole rule and measure of all our desires: and what is the undoubted will of God, but that in every thing we pray for, we should consult, above all, his honour, and the good of our souls? This is plainly taught us both by the *preface*, and every order of the petitions in our *Lord's prayer*, which is the pattern of all other prayers; and, in effect, all other prayers offered to Almighty God, are but a paraphrase upon it. We are taught then by its *preface* to address ourselves to God, as our *heavenly Father*; to put us in mind, that being his children, we must have a zeal for his honour, seek to inherit the kingdom he has prepared for us, and be governed by him, rather than our own wills and desires: And therefore these three petitions, 1. *Hallowed be thy name*, 2. *Thy Kingdom come*, 3. *Thy will be done*, have the first rank, and are placed at the head of all the rest; to mark out to us, that they must over-rule all our other prayers, and be as settled principles and maxims presupposed to, and implied in every thing we ask. Whoever prays for a temporal concern with these previous dispositions, will find the fruit of them in a solid peace and tranquillity of mind; whether he meets with a grant or refusal of the things he prays for.

I will instance in the particular case of sickness, and address myself to those who are much afflicted with it, and pray for health. I ask them precisely, upon what terms they pray for it? and whether they desire their recovery, whether it be or be not pleasing to God? whether it be for the good or prejudice of their souls? If they be dispos-

ed, as the *Israelites* were in the desert they will answer that they will put that to the hazard; that their business is to have health, no matter how. Perhaps they will not speak so plain: but if they be so disposed at heart, which is all one; it is no wonder if they be impatient and fretful, and ready to murmur against God; when their desires are not gratified. And all I have to say to them, is to wish them a better disposition, and that God, instead of giving them health, will mercifully turn their hearts, and make them become better Christians.

But if, on the contrary, they answer from the bottom of their hearts, that they would chuse to suffer the most painful sickness, even to their last breath, rather than ask any thing that should be displeasing to God, or prejudicial to their souls: Oh! then let them pray on with these happy dispositions, and employ all natural means ordained by the Almighty for their recovery, though both the one and the other should prove ineffectual; because they are sure not to be disappointed in the main end of their prayer. It is true, they pray for health, and obtain it not; but they pray not absolutely for it, but only upon this condition, if it be God's holy will and pleasure. So that the principal subject of their prayer is, that the will of God be accomplished: When therefore the event has manifested, that it is God's will that their sickness should continue, have they not obtained the principal end of their desire? and they will certainly acquiesce to it with an entire repose of mind, if their prayers were sincere: For if they pay not a hearty submission to it, but appears dissatisfied with the event, and repine under the weight of their cross, it is a mark, that when their tongues pronounced these words *thy will be done* their hearts spoke another language: For it is a contradiction to seek the will of God sincerely, and

and not submit to it, when it has manifested itself in the event.

However, this hinders not the giving grains of allowance to nature. A good Christian is as sensible of pain as a bad one; and a fit of the gout, stone or cholick, will force complaints from the one as well as the other. But place before a good Christian, his ease on the one hand, and the will of God, in opposition to it, on the other, and bid him take his choice; and he will certainly prefer God's will before his own ease: and it is precisely in this preference that the heart speaks, gives the law to all irregular desires of nature, and finds a solid peace, under the most acute pains of the body. This is that peace, which the Apostle recommended to the primitive Christians, for the *guard of their hearts and intellects*; which the martyrs found amidst the bitterest torments; which nothing but a hearty submission to the will of God can procure us; which, finally, is the greatest blessing of this life, and a pledge of future happiness; which God through his infinite goodness grant us all. *Amen.*

THE THIRTY-SECOND ENTERTAINMENT.

FOR THE BEGINNING OF THE NEW YEAR.

Jesus increased in wisdom, age, and grace.

Luke, ii. 52.

THE gospel, from whence these words are taken, is yearly read to us at our very entrance into the new year, because it places an example before us which ought to direct us in all the several stages of life. For, whatever concerns a man may otherwise have upon his hands, the principal business of a Christian, is to increase in *grace*

grace and *virtue*, as he grows up in *years*. He is a traveller in this world; heaven is his home; his life is his journey to it; and the main business of a traveller is to be daily advancing nearer to his journey's end: So that the sun should never set upon him, without finding him as many steps nearer heaven, as it finds him nearer to his grave.

Here then let us consider, whether we have hitherto been directed by this great rule. Are we already as much advanced in virtue as we are in age? Have we gained ground upon our corrupt inclinations, proportionably to the steps we have already made towards our graves? Has every year made some considerable change for the better? And do we find ourselves as much better, as we are now older than we were last year, or the year before, or some years ago? Alas! How is it to be feared there are but few who can, without wronging truth, give this account of themselves! How is it to be feared that, but too many, upon an impartial review of themselves, will find they have rather lost than gained ground! And what will be the end at long run? What will become of us, if we thus continue from year to year under the same sinful habits? If the end of every year finds us either worse, or nothing better than it left us in the beginning? Must not such a course as this terminate in our everlasting ruin?

That therefore we may become thoroughly sensible of the danger that threatens all delaying sinners, and by consequence, of the necessity of taking up in time, and beginning a new life, with the new year we are now entering into, I have made choice of an easy and familiar truth, to convince all persons, conscious to themselves of being in an unsafe or dangerous way, that their
eternal

eternal lot may, perhaps, depend upon the measures they take this very year. The truth then I mean to offer to their most serious consideration, and which shall make the whole subject of this entertainment, is this, *viz.* that this very year may be designed by Almighty God, to put a period to their lives, and be the last they are ever like to see.

That the year we are now entered into may be the last of our lives, is a truth so certain, that nothing but a presumption, even to a degree of madness, can incline us to entertain the least doubt of it: And therefore it stands not so much in need of proofs to convince the judgment, as of a serious meditation to imprint it in our hearts. It is certain we are not masters of our own lives, nor is any man privileged even to know, much less to carve for himself, the portion of life he is to enjoy. We are but tenants at pleasure; and God alone, of whom we hold our being, who has hitherto preserved it, and will one day put a period to all time; he alone, I say, has the power of life and death in his own hands, and measures out to every one the number of their days, according to his will and pleasure.

Whence it evidently follows, that since no man can positively promise himself even one single day or hour, much less can he pretend to an infallible assurance of out-living the year we have now before us. Youth cannot secure any one of it, since many thousands are yearly nipped in the very bud, or cut off in the flower of their age: Neither can our being now in perfect health, or the particular advantage of a good habit of body, insure our lives for any length of time; because we find, by doleful experience, that there are many times scarce one hour's space between the most perfect health, and a mortal distemper, under

der which the very strongest constitution cannot hold for many days: To say nothing of violent deaths occasioned by accidents, against which no precaution can shelter us, and to which both young and old, weak and strong, infirm and healthful constitutions, are equally exposed.

How many in the world are now actually upon their death-bed, and expecting hourly their summons before the tribunal of God, who, but a few days ago, were as likely to live as any of us? Nay, how many are now dead, and cold in their graves, and already become the food of worms, who perhaps, but some few months or weeks ago, had as good a prospect of a longer life before them, and as fair hopes of surviving those they have left behind, as the very youngest and most healthful of this assembly? What reason then have we to promise ourselves another year, more than they seemed to have so small a time before they were taken out of this world? Are our lives any thing better insured? Or are we not liable to the very same accidents, which so soon blasted all their flattering hopes of a long life? And why then may not their case happen to be ours, before another twelve-month goes round? Why may not this year put a period to our lives, as well as the last year made an end of theirs? Our bodies are made of the same clay, our lives hang by as slender a thread, and are exposed to all the same hazards, either of a violent or natural death, as theirs were.

Add to this, that as the last year has sent many thousands to the other world, who, at the beginning of it, were as likely to live as any of us; so nothing is more certain, than that many thousands more, even within the precincts of this island, will never see the end of this year: And who can assure any of us, that it will not fall to his

share to be of the number? What reason have we to promise ourselves a privilege above any of our fellow-mortals? It is true, the matter being doubtful and uncertain, it is not at all unreasonable to hope the best: But since it is doubtful, it is also a great folly not to fear the worst, and downright madness not to provide against it. The very possibility of it, considering how great a concern is at stake, is motive enough to make us as effectually resolve upon all the necessary preparations for it, as if we had an infallible assurance that it would happen to us.

But, alas! there is more than a bare possibility in the case. The many dangers we are exposed to within the compass of a year, that of a violent death on the one hand, or a natural on the other, make it more than barely possible, and give sufficient grounds for a reasonable apprehension of it, and the necessary precautions against it: For let us but consider how many unforeseen and altogether unavoidable accidents may happen, in much less time than the compass of twelve months. May not the slip of a foot, the stroke or fall of a horse, a violent cold, a malignant fever, or apoplectic fit, make an end of us in a very short warning? And are we not continually liable to some of those misfortunes? But suppose Almighty God should visit us with a plague, (the case is not impossible) or any other epidemical distemper that is mortal, as we know not but he may, who is there, in this case, secure of his life, even for one single day? So that you see our not out-living this year, is not a mere imaginary supposition, without ground or reason: But the hazard of it is great enough to oblige any one, who truly tenders his soul's salvation, to resolve, without delay, upon such measures as may put him into the condition he would be found in, whenever

whenever it shall please Almighty God to call upon him.

Oh ! how many miserable souls are now burning in unquenchable flames, who might have been happy souls in Heaven, had they but taken this course a year ago ! Many were perhaps exhorted to it, and forewarned of the danger that threatened them, just as you now are ; but presuming they had still time enough before them, and thereupon neglecting the summons of the divine mercy, were cut off in the midst of their disorders, and when perhaps they looked least for it ; and are now doomed to everlasting torments : And who can tell, but if, like them, we should continue deaf to the voice of mercy calling upon us, death, the executioner of God's justice, may likewise overtake us, when we are least aware of it, and appoint us to receive with them the deserved reward of our folly ?

There is a parable, in the 13th chapter of St. Luke, which seems to threaten all delaying sinners with this misfortune, and suits exactly with the main subject of our discourse. Our Saviour proposes it in these terms : *A certain man had a fig-tree planted in his vineyard, and he came to seek fruit upon it, and he found none. Then said he to the dresser of the vineyard, Behold, these three years have I sought fruit on this fig-tree, and found none : Cut it therefore down ; why encumbers it the earth ? But the dresser of the vineyard answered him ; Lord, let it only stand this year, till I dig about it, and dung it, and perhaps it will bear fruit ; if not, then you may cut it down.*

This is the parable, and the moral of it is plain and obvious. The *barren fig-tree* is a lively figure of a mere believing Christian ; who, though he be planted in *Christ's* vineyard by baptism
and

and faith, and watered with many graces and favours; yet his faith, being dead and barren, yields no fruit of good works: However, Almighty God, the great master of the vineyard, looks yearly for fruit from him; and if, after many years expectation, he finds none, he resolves at length to cut him down: But upon the earnest supplications of some of his chosen servants, or the prayers of his holy Church, the execution of this dreadful sentence is deferred for some time: A reprieve is granted to him, perhaps for another year, in hopes of his bearing fruit: In the mean time, the dresser of the vineyard *digs, and lays dung about him*; that is, uses all necessary care, either by private admonitions, or public exhortations, to put him in mind of his mortal condition, and the danger of his state: But if, after all care taken to make him become fruitful, he continues barren as before, as soon as the time of forbearance is expired, the decreed sentence of death, which is but the fore-runner of a more terrible one, is, without further delay, executed upon him.

Now, let us apply the whole parable to ourselves, and see how far we are concerned in every part of it: And, in the first place, let us, upon a general review of our lives past, consider, whether the lasting barrenness of the *fig-tree*, be not a faithful representation of our unhappy state: For how many years are now already past, since we first contracted the sinful habit, in which we still find ourselves as deeply engaged as ever? How many years has our merciful Lord already expected *worthy fruits of penance* from us? And have we hitherto yielded him any thing but empty promises, fruitless desires, and resolutions without effect? How justly then may he make this complaint of us, *Behold, these ten, twenty,*

twenty, thirty years, have I sought fruit on this fig-tree, and I find none? And how justly then might he long since have sentenced us to be cut down, and cast into the fire?

His patience, indeed, and long forbearance, is nothing less than a miracle of goodness: it is not to be doubted, but, unless some favourite souls had stood in the gap, and disarmed his justice, so often provoked by our reiterated sins; unless the tears and prayers of his holy Church had interposed, and obtained from time to time a reprieve for us, in hopes of our being at length cured of our barrenness, and yielding him the long expected fruit; he had many years ago ordered the earth to be cleared of us, as being but so many dead trunks, which, instead of answering the ends for which we were planted in his vineyard, are only an incumbrance to it, and even apt to infect those that are yet sound, and bear fruit in due season.

But since he only forbears the executing of this sentence upon us, in expectation of our making good at length our past deficiency, by a plentiful after-crop of *worthy fruits* of penance; it is certain his forbearance will not hold always: Some year or other will put an end to it: and who knows but our doom may be fixed for this very year? Who can tell but we may be sentenced to die, before we ever see the beginning of the next new year? For, since the divine goodness has already forborn so long with us, does not the main drift of the fore-mentioned parable give us sufficient reason to apprehend our time draws near; and that the axe is already laid to the root to cut us down, unless we prevent the fatal blow by a speedy amendment, and worthy fruits of penance?

Here

Here then it will be proper to reflect seriously with ourselves, what has hitherto been the principal obstacle to our amendment: For unless this be discovered, and care taken to remove it, our state will either be always the same; or, instead of mending with time, we shall only pass from better to worse. Now it is unquestionably true, that a long continuance in sin, is either owing to some outward cause, or to some wilful neglect in the party concerned: If it be occasioned by some outward cause, every one's own experience will both give him the surest information of the true source of this weakness, and mark out to him the only expedient to prevent it in future; which is, his keeping at the greatest distance possible from that occasion: For, if this be not done, all other endeavours will signify nothing. He may make the best resolutions in the world; but if he loves danger so as to expose himself to it without necessity, he will certainly perish in it; and the end of the year will always leave him either worse, or in the same condition, in which it found him in the beginning.

But if, upon examination, he finds the chief obstacle of his amendment to be within himself; as that *idleness*, the fruitful mother of vice, has the ascendant over him: or that an over-concern for his *worldly interest*, draws his heart from God, and the concerns of a better life; or finally, that *sloth* prevails frequently upon him: to neglect the sacraments, or the duty of prayer, which are the ordinary channels, through which God's grace is conveyed to our souls; and by thus stripping him of his spiritual armour, lays him open to every temptation that assaults him: If, I say, he finds any of these to have hitherto obstructed his amendment of life; as these obstacles are wholly voluntary and within himself, so no-
thing

thing but a change of will, vigorously exerting itself in opposition to them, can possibly remove them, and unless they be removed, his state of weakness will always continue the same, and the loss of his soul will be the unavoidable consequence of it.

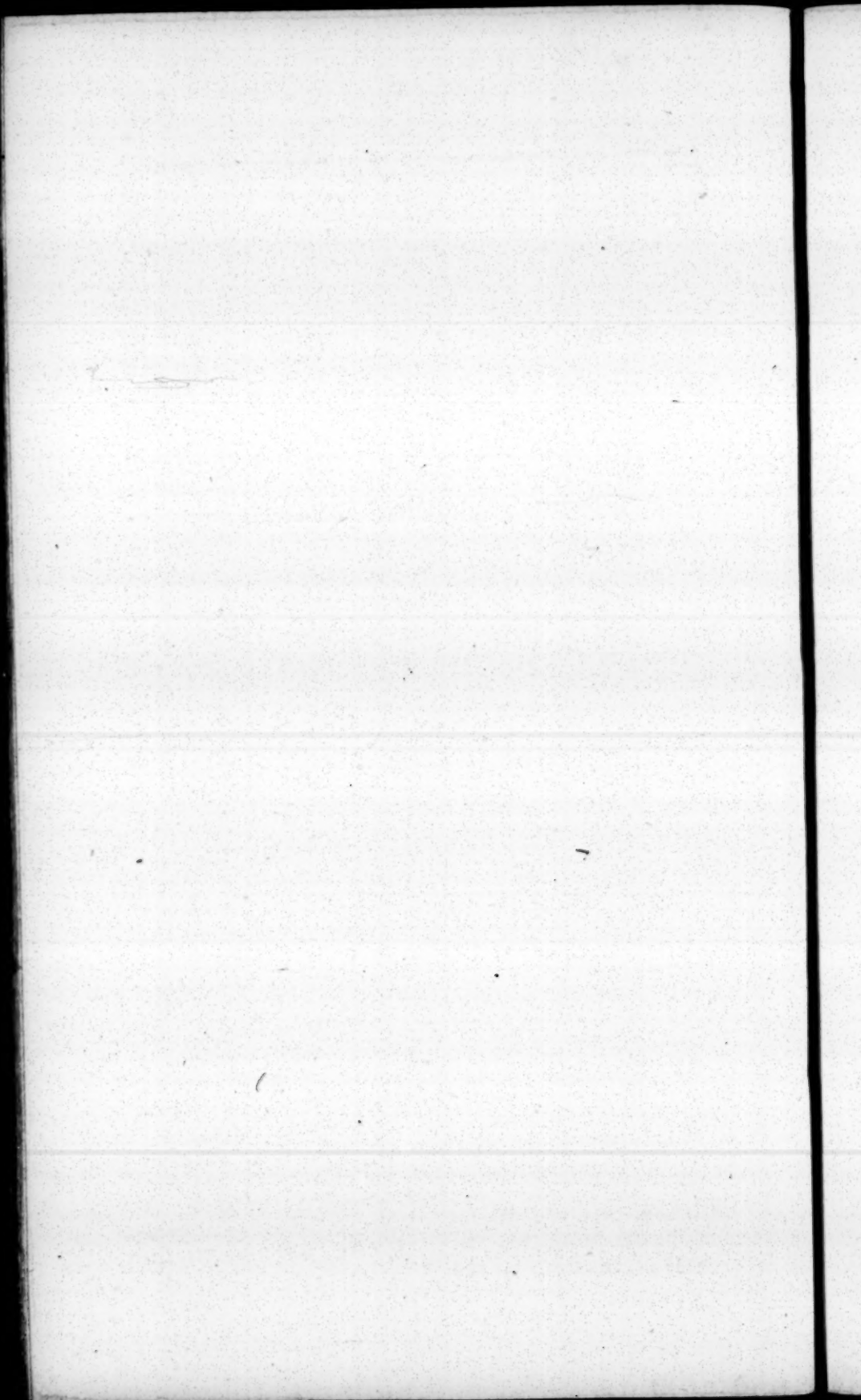
If any man tells me that natural inclination alone, without any previous neglect on his side, drags him many times to sin: I answer, 1. That no man can be dragged so violently as to lose the power of resisting; because his will is always free; and there can be no sin without the free consent of the will. I answer, 2dly, That every one concerned will, upon a strict examination of himself, find, that either some preceding neglect in the duty of prayer, or his not having armed himself with vigorous resolutions in the morning, or a want of watchfulness over himself at the first approach of a temptation, when it might have easily been checked, has always been the forerunner of those consents, to which he pretends to have been dragged, with a violence beyond his power of resisting. But, 3dly, I ask, whether this pretence is to hold always, or not? If so, I wish it may not cover a design never to mend at all: If not, why then will he not resolve to begin out of hand, to oppose an enemy so powerful already, and who will daily get ground upon him, if a stop be not put to it by a vigorous resistance.

But time and age, says the delaying sinner, weaken all inclinations; and then they will be easily subdued. This is very true, in those who have always resolutely opposed them: For these usually pass their riper years in a triumph rather than combat. But no man in the world ever became abler to resist, whilst he held on in a custom of yielding. Nay, it is certain on the contrary,

contrary, that every sinful inclination gathers strength proportionably as it is gratified; and that time, which would have weakened it, had it been resisted, serves but to increase its power, when it is often yielded to.

But to return to my principal consideration; suppose the delaying sinner be denied that time or age, on which he so much depends, for the weakening and subduing of his sinful inclinations: Suppose death cuts him off, whilst they are yet in their full strength, and before he has made any serious efforts towards this great work: What becomes of him then? I leave him to reflect upon the consequences of it: and since he can have no security that this will not happen to him; it is manifest he cannot answer it, I will not say to God, but even to common sense and reason, if he goes on in his usual delays, on whatever plausible pretence of present difficulties they may be grounded: Because whatever his present difficulties are, time and delays will but increase them, and remove him at a greater distance from his return to God, by the same steps as they daily bring him nearer to his grave.

A GENE-



A

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OF THE

PRINCIPAL MATTERS TREATED ON

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END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.



